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Northwest Power and Conservation Council

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March 3, 2026

MEMORANDUM

TO: Council Members

FROM: Patty O'Toole, Fish and Wildlife Division Director

SUBJECT: Fish and Wildlife Program Amendments

BACKGROUND:

Presenter: Council staff

Summary: At the March Council meeting, the staff will review the amendment process and next steps, recap the public comment period and hearings, then discuss with the members the comments received on the draft 2026 Columbia River Basin Fish and Wildlife Program.

Relevance: The Council is currently in a Program amendment process as directed by the Northwest Power Act

Workplan: This work addresses a primary responsibility under the Northwest Power Act and tasks A. 5,6,7,8 of the 2026 Fish and Wildlife Division Work Plan under the Program Policy and Planning function.

Background:

The Council released the draft 2026 Columbia River Basin Fish and Wildlife Program on December 17, 2025. The release initiated a public comment period that included nine public hearings around the basin, consultations with interested partners and written comments. The

comment period closed on March 2, 2026. The Council received over 1300 written comments in addition to those comments collected at public hearings and one-on-one consultations with individual entities. These include comments from (*estimated*): four state and interstate fish and wildlife agencies; 13 Columbia Basin Tribes and tribal organizations; four federal agencies; 25 Bonneville Customers, Other Utilities, Utility Organizations, River Industry Entities and Groups, Ports and Other Local Governments, 29 environmental and fishing organizations or other non-governmental organizations; and over 1200 individuals. The written comments received will be available soon on the [amendment webpage](#).

During the Council meeting, staff will discuss and review the comments with the Council members. Council staff will work to synthesize the comments into a high-level summary in the few days between the close of comment and the March Council meeting. Comments fall generally into a range from those that are clarifying or neutral in nature to those that represent significant revision or a change in direction. We will discuss options for working through all the types of comments and discuss options for proceeding with revisions.

Next steps:

Subsequent Council meetings in April and May will be used to work through the draft Program and edits based on the comments.

Following are the dates of anticipated Council meetings when portions of the meetings (Power plan work will be needed as well) will be focused on this amendment work:

- April 14, 15, 16 Council meeting in Whitefish Montana
- April 28, 29 virtual Council meeting
- May 12, 13, 14 Council meeting in Pendleton, Oregon
- May 27, 28, 29 virtual Council meetings, however if the Council is ready to make its decision in late May, we would propose a day in person to make final revisions and hold the vote to adopt the Program (probably Portland, Oregon but TBD)
- Other dates TBD

As the formal written comment period has ended, we are winding down the input for the Council to consider as we work towards final amendments for adoption. There will come a moment before the final decision when the Council shuts off *all external communication* on the draft Program and makes its final decision solely on the accumulated record. The Council has some discretion as to when to choose to close off any further external discussion. Our past practice is to have that occur *roughly a month* before the final decision. Assuming the Council stays on track to decide on the final Program text in May, this would mean closing off external communication on the draft Program shortly *after the April Council meeting*. The staff will confirm this timeframe with members at the March meeting.

Until the Council closes its external record, members and staff may continue to talk with people outside the Council about the draft Fish and Wildlife Program and about the issues in the Program. **All external conversations** – oral and written **MUST** be followed by writing a summary

note about the conversation and sending that note to Kendra Coles or John Shurts for circulation to all members and relevant staff and inclusion in the administrative record. The note should state who the conversation was with and summarize the topics of the conversation. If you do not feel comfortable documenting the conversation, please do not have it.

Note that this is not the time for substantial comments or new comments – those should have come in during the formal comment period. This is a period for *clarification, questions to understand comments, points of emphasis, and limited dialogue.*

Decision to adopt the 2026 Fish and Wildlife Program

The estimated target for adopting an amendment Program is May of 2026, but staff recommends the Council take the time it needs to conclude its work on the Fish and Wildlife Program. We are currently holding six days in May for possible Council deliberation and decision as we have a lot of material to work through and consider. Staff is uncertain how much time will be needed to revise the draft Program and be ready for a Council decision. It will depend on the number of comments, their complexity, the issues and Council member deliberations on any proposed revisions.

The decision to adopt amendments is made in-person at a Council meeting and must be made through a roll call vote of the members. The Act says that for a Program to be approved by the Council it requires a vote to approve by either (a) a majority of the members appointed of the Council that includes at least one member from each state or (b) at least six members of the Council. Of course, our experience is that a Program approved by a unanimous vote has more policy influence.

Columbia River Basin Fish and Wildlife Program Amendment Process

Council meeting
March 11, 2026



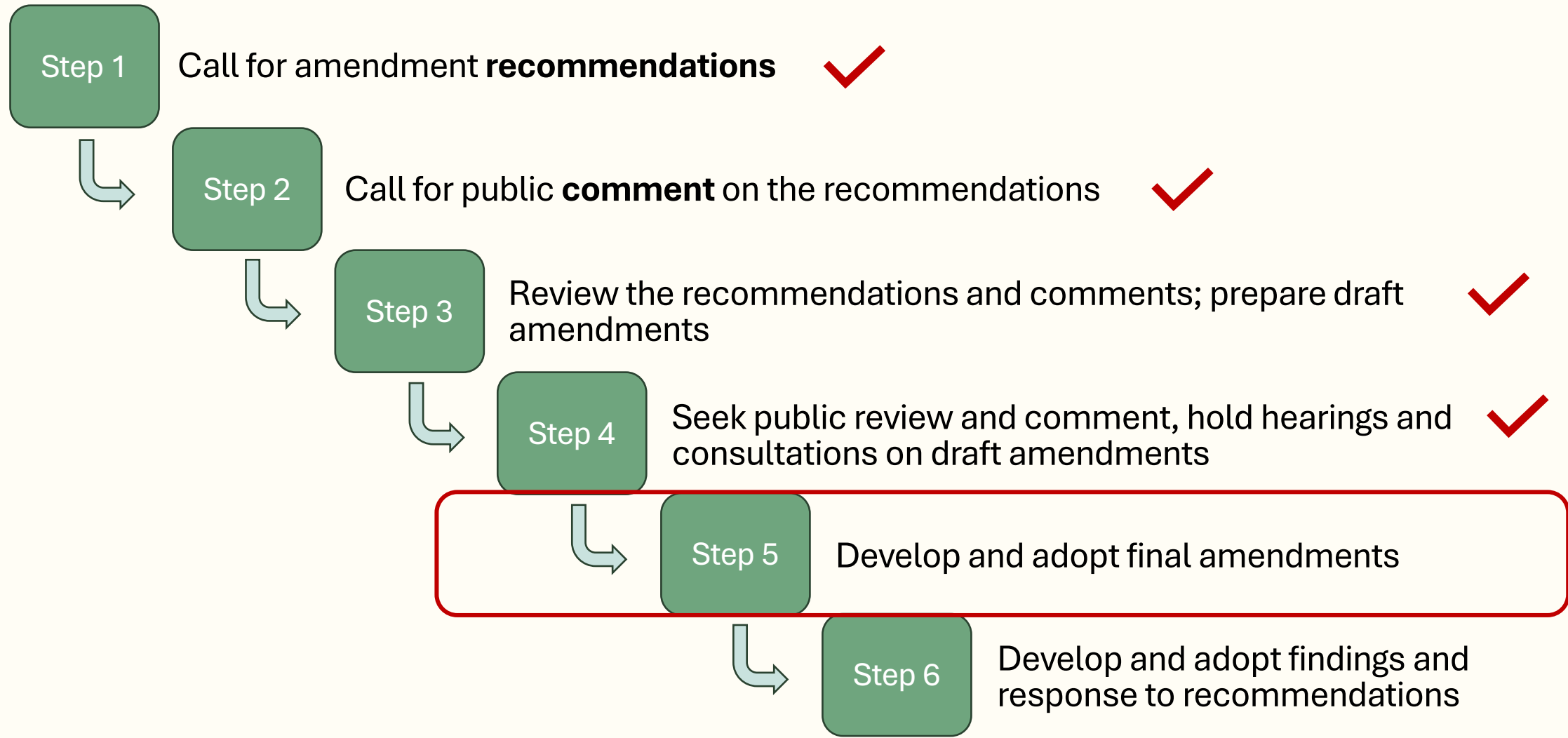
Today's topics

1. Process check in

- Review amendment steps and general timeframe
- Recap of the public comment period on Draft 2026 Columbia River Basin Fish and Wildlife Program
 - Hearings
 - Consultations
 - Written comments
- Next steps
 - Administrative record
 - Revisions
 - Upcoming Council decision

2. Review and discuss comments

Overview of Fish and Wildlife Program Amendment steps

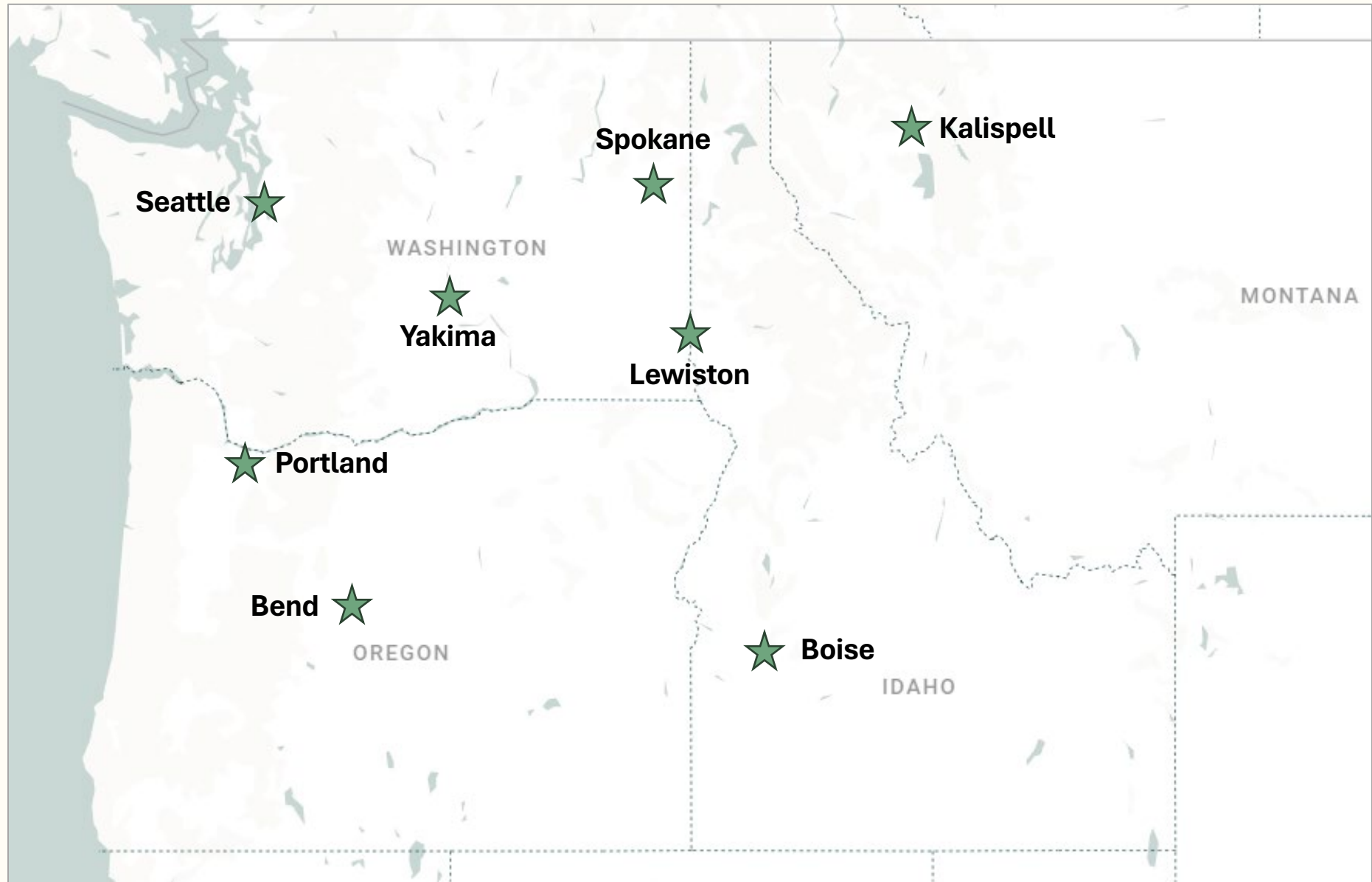


Public Hearings



Public Hearings

- 9 total hearings, including 3 hybrid and 1 online only
- Approx 535 total attendees and 230 comments



Public Hearings: Organizations

350 Spokane
American Cetacean Society
American Rivers
Bayside Park and Marine Center
Benton Rural Electric Association
Big Bend Electric Cooperative
Bonneville Power Administration
Center for Environmental Law and Policy
Central Electric Cooperative
Chelan PUD
Citizens for the Preservation of Fish and Dams
Clearwater Paper Company
Clearwater Power
Columbia Snake River Campaign
Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes staff
Conservation Lands Foundation
Consolidated Oregon Indivisible Network
Cowlitz Public Utility District
Custer County Soil and Water Conservation District
Duna Fisheries
Emerald People's Utility District
Empty Bowl Press
Extinction Rebellion Palouse
F.H. Stoltze Land & Lumber Co.
Flathead County Board of Commissioners
Flathead Electric Cooperative
Flathead Food Bank
Franklin PUD
Friends of the Clearwater
Friends of the San Juans
Golden Eagle Audubon
Green Energy Institute
Idaho Association of Soil Conservation Districts
Idaho Conservation League
Idaho Consumer-Owned Utilities Association
Idaho County Light and Power

Idaho Department of Fish and Game
Idaho Falls Power
Idaho Master Naturalists
Idaho Mythweaver
Idaho Outfitters and Guides Association
Idaho Power
Idaho Rivers United
Idaho Sierra Club
Idaho Water Users Association
Indivisible Bend
Inland Power & Light Company
International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 77
Kalispel Tribe of Indians staff
Kalispell Chamber of Commerce
Kittitas Reclamation District
Lakeview Light & Power
League of Women Voters
Lewis-Clark Terminal
Lower Valley Energy
McGregor Company
Midstate Electric Cooperative
Modern Electric Water Company
Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association
National Parks Conservation Association
National Wildlife Federation
Nez Perce County Soil and Water Conservation District
Nez Perce tribal members
Northwest Energy Coalition
Northwest Fisheries Enhancement
Northwest Sportfishing Industry Association
Northwest RiverPartners
NW Public Power Association
Orca Network
Oregon Municipal Electric Utilities Association
Pacific Coast Federation of Fisherman's Association

Pacific Rivers
Port of Clarkston
Port of Lewiston
Save Our Wild Salmon
Seattle Aquarium
Seattle University students
Skamania PUD
Spokane Falls Trout Unlimited
Spokane Riverkeeper
Spokane Tribe of Indians members
staff for U.S. Sen. Jim Risch
staff for U.S. Sen. Mike Crapo
Tacoma Public Utilities
The Cascadians
Trout Unlimited Deschutes Redbands Chapter
U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
University of Idaho students
University of Puget Sound students
Upper Columbia United Tribes
Wasco Electric Cooperative
Washington Association of Wheat Growers
Washington Conservation Action
Washington State Sierra Club
Wells Rural Electric Company
Weyerhaeuser
Yakama Nation members
Yakima Valley College Climate and Environment Club
Youth Salmon Protectors
Zocalo Studios

Consultations

- Participated in 7 consultation meetings
- Met with states, tribes/tribal entities, Bonneville customer groups
- Comments at the meetings generally mirrored what we have received in written comment, with opportunities for questions and discussion

Written comments

- Comment period closed March 2
- Over 1300 comments
- We will characterize these for you further a little later in this agenda item
- All are posted on the Council's amendment website: [**nwcouncil.org/amend**](https://nwcouncil.org/amend)

The screenshot shows the Northwest Power and Conservation Council website. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the council's logo and name, a 'CONTACT' link, and a search bar. Below the navigation bar, there are several menu items: ABOUT, NEWS, FISH AND WILDLIFE, POWER PLANNING, MEETINGS, and REPORTS AND DOCUMENTS. The main content area features a large banner for the 'Columbia River Basin Fish and Wildlife Program' with a sub-header: 'Public comments on the [Draft 2026 Fish and Wildlife Program](#) are now available.' Below the banner, there are two columns of text. The left column is titled 'About the amendment process' and contains two paragraphs of text. The right column is titled 'Comments on the Draft Program' and contains a paragraph of text followed by a list of public hearings. A red arrow points to the right column.

Northwest Power and Conservation Council

CONTACT Enter your keywords SEARCH

ABOUT NEWS FISH AND WILDLIFE POWER PLANNING MEETINGS REPORTS AND DOCUMENTS

Columbia River Basin Fish and Wildlife Program

Public comments on the [Draft 2026 Fish and Wildlife Program](#) are now available.

About the amendment process

The Council amends its Columbia River Basin Fish and Wildlife Program every five years based largely on recommendations from the federal and state fish and wildlife agencies and the region's Indian tribes. Other federal and state agencies, the Bonneville utility customers and other regional utilities, other river users, local governments, and the general public may also submit program amendment recommendations that the Council must consider.

In 2025, the Council requested [recommendations](#) in its [January solicitation](#), and [comments](#) on those recommendations in its [May solicitation](#). Since July 2025, the Council has been working to develop a draft amended Fish and Wildlife Program based on the recommendations and comments. In December 2025, the [Draft 2026 Program](#) was released for public comments through March 2, 2026, with public hearings in January and February.

Comments on the Draft Program

See [public comments](#) received on the [Draft 2026 Fish and Wildlife Program](#) through March 2, 2026. Also see transcripts from the public hearings:

- January 13 ([Portland](#))
- January 29 ([Kalispell](#) and [Lewiston](#))
- February 3 ([Spokane](#))
- February 4 ([Yakima](#))
- February 12 ([Boise](#) and [Bend](#))
- February 17 ([Seattle](#))
- February 24 (webinar)



**Next steps:
The path
ahead...**



Administrative record

- Remains open, should be only clarification, questions on comments, points of emphasis
- Limited dialogue
- All written and oral conversations must be summarized and given to John or Kendra
- When to close the record?



How to proceed with revisions

- Comments generally:
- From staff preliminary observation, comments generally fit into rough categories, from neutral or small edits to issues of more significance to issues of bigger significance. Significance = Comment is controversial and/or represents a significant change to language in the draft Program

Neutral, small issues	Significant issues	Bigger significant issues
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- Discuss how to work through comments and revisions systematically
- All revisions will be made in track changes (redline) for Council review and approval



Dates of anticipated Council meetings (will include Power Plan work too)

Dates	Location of Council meeting
April 14-16	Council meeting in Whitefish, Montana
April 28-29	Virtual Council meeting
May 12-14	Council meeting in Pendleton, Oregon
May 27-29	Virtual Council meeting If the Council is ready to make its decision in late May, we would propose a day in person to make final revisions and hold the vote to adopt the Program (probably Portland, Oregon but TBD)
Other dates TBD as needed	



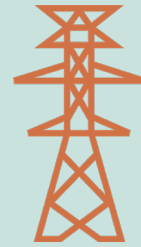
Pending decision to adopt a final, amended Columbia River Basin Fish and Wildlife Program

- Timeline: May?
 - Timing is up to the Council members, based on time needed for deliberations
- Must notice the pending decision on the agenda, prepare a decision memorandum and motion
- Make the decision in person at a Council meeting
- Decision is by a roll call vote of the Council members
- Decision requires a vote to approve by either a) a majority of the members appointed of the Council that includes at least one member from each state or b) at least six members of the Council
- Following the decision, still need to develop and approve the *Findings and Response to Recommendations* as part of the final Program – usually a few months to complete





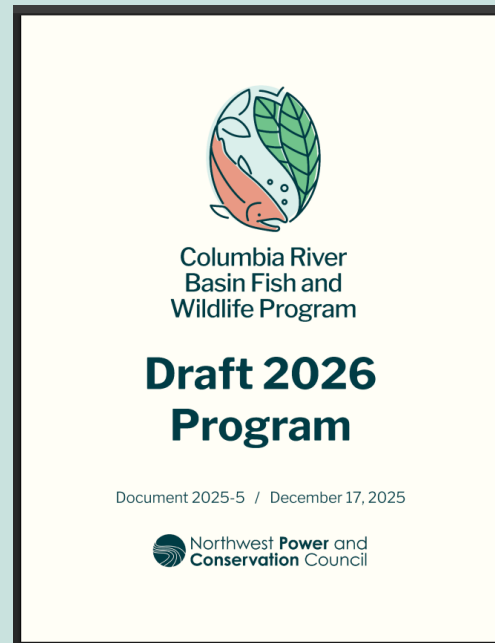
Written Comments



Written comments

- 3 state fish and wildlife agencies provided written comments
- 13 tribes or tribal organizations
- 4 federal agencies
- More than three dozen Bonneville customer utilities and utility groups; numerous other river and water users groups, business entities, ports
- More than two dozen environmental and fishing groups and related NGOs
- Over 1000 comments from individuals, most of which fall into one of two groups – supportive of the environmental/fishing group perspective or supportive of the utility/industry perspective

Overview and discussion of comments



Extra slides

Estimated timeline for Fish and Wildlife Program Amendment Process

