Agreement appears near on a proposal for year-round minimum flows that will restore the 4.1-mile Chelan River as a more natural stream, rising and falling with the seasonal snowmelt and providing habitat for a variety of fish.

The minimum flow issue for the river has been considered the biggest hurdle yet to be overcome by the various participants in the relicensing process for the Lake Chelan Hydroelectric Project. That's because spilling water down the river channel instead of running it through the penstock and the powerhouse takes valuable electrical generation out of production, cutting into the supply available to the customers of the PUD.

Proposals for minimum flows also had the potential to drop lake levels during busy tourism periods, a consequence considered by many to be unacceptable to the local economy.

But continuing negotiations since last fall between Chelan County PUD and members of an agency/tribal caucus have led to a proposal that appears to be acceptable to all the key parties. Its basic starting point is year-round flows of 80 cubic feet per second (cfs) down the river from the dam to the Columbia. (See graph on Page 2.)

In average water years (60 percent of the time), the flow would gradually be ramped up to 200 cfs and then back down to 80 cfs from April 18 to July 12. In high water years (20 percent of the time), the flow would be ramped up to 320 cfs for that period. In low water years, the flow would stay at 80 cfs.

The temporary increase is considered important by state and federal natural resource agencies to match the natural spring conditions that historically occurred from snowmelt. It's considered a return to a more natural river ecosystem.

An additional element of the proposal would provide extra water in the lower end of the river known as Reach 4, just above the confluence with the Columbia River. When necessary, water would be pumped from the tailrace of the powerhouse and spilled into the Reach 4 channel. By pumping it from the tailrace, water wouldn’t have to be spilled down the entire channel and would be used after it had already generated electricity.

The augmented spawning flows would be 320 cfs just in Reach 4 from approximately March 15 to May 15 for steelhead and from Oct. 15 to Nov. 31 for fall chinook salmon.

Some structural improvements (such as more gravel and underwater islands) would be added in the tailrace to boost spawning habitat there as well. And a bulldozer would reconfigure parts of the existing river channel in Reach 4 to provide more shelter behind large boulders and narrow the width of the channel so it might be more suitable as natural spawning and rearing area for chinook.

(continued on Page 2)
LAKE CHELAN HYDRO PROJECT

How minimum flows would be shaped during the year in the Chelan River

A base flow of 80 cfs would be maintained at all times, even during drought years. Peak flows to mimic natural conditions in late spring and early summer would be ramped up and down in normal- and high-water years. Higher flows for spawning just in Reach 4 would be added for short periods in the spring and fall by pumping from the tailrace.

Endowment Fund for local projects

Chelan County PUD is working with local people in the Chelan-Manson area to come up with an innovative way to make money available for local projects in the future. The idea is to secure some financing even though many desirable local projects may not normally qualify for relicensing funds since they’re not directly related to ongoing impacts from hydropower operations.

The best opportunity appears to be an Endowment Fund, in which money ultimately designated for various project-related impacts would be set aside by the PUD in an investment account to earn interest for up to five years. That accumulated interest could then be split off into a separate fund to be drawn upon by local groups over the next 50 years. Spending of the original investment would begin on project-related impacts after year five.

If the original investment is $4 million, a modest return of 5 percent per year for five years might provide approximately $1.2 million in local seed money for the future, depending on the impacts of inflation. If that fund then earned the same 5 percent a year on average, roughly $60,000 a year might be available for local projects, again depending on inflation.

The Endowment Fund would be managed by a qualified financial organization based on criteria and policies to be developed through the Social Sciences Working Group in the relicensing process.

Lake Chelan Timeline

2001  Aug. 15: Second draft of Preliminary Draft Environmental Assessment (PDEA) issued by Chelan PUD
    Oct. 15: Comments due on second draft PDEA

2002  March 31: Submit final License Application and PDEA to Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC)
Chelan County PUD and fisheries agencies are getting a better look at the habits of bull trout thanks to a tagging survey that is off to a successful start.

Radio transmitters (about the size of an AA battery with a foot-long, threadlike antenna) have been implanted in 39 fish — 10 at Wells, 7 at Rock Island and 22 at Rocky Reach. Half the fish were released downstream of each project and half upstream. The study was originally designed to trap 10 fish at Rock Island, but not enough fish were found in time so a few were added at Rocky Reach. The movements of tagged fish will be tracked by following the radio signals for about a year.

The transmitters, costing about $200 apiece, do not appear to harm the fish. Resembling small old-fashioned radio tubes, the transmitters were implanted using a surgical procedure in which the fish were gently anesthetized and carefully handled while the work was done.

A small incision was made in the belly of a fish, the transmitter was placed inside the body cavity (with the threadlike antenna extending through a small hole in the skin) and then three or four stitches were used to close up the body cavity before the fish recovered from the anesthetic and was released back into the river.

Special permission had to be received from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for the study since bull trout are listed as a threatened species. The agency is interested in knowing more about bull trout migration as part of studies being done for relicensing the Rocky Reach Hydro Project.

Scott Kreiter of Chelan PUD’s relicensing team is overseeing the tagging project, using consultants to do the year-long study at a cost of about $400,000. The expenditures cover designing and building the trapping mechanisms, capturing the fish, inserting the tags surgically, tracking the fish periodically until next spring and writing preliminary and final reports.

Where they’ve gone

Here’s where the bull trout went, according to an aerial survey at the end of June, before all fish were tagged:

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<td>1</td>
<td>Columbia mainstem</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Wenatchee River</td>
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<td>Libby Creek</td>
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<td>Buttermilk Creek</td>
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Bob Boyd
PUD Commissioner

Bob Boyd had no electricity in his early boyhood home near Manson. Now he’s one of five commissioners guiding a public utility that generates close to 2,000 megawatts.

Born Dale Robert Boyd, the nickname “Bob” quickly replaced Dale, and he’s been known by it ever since. After growing up in what’s known as the Boyd District between Chelan and Manson (named after a homestead launched by his great grandfather William Boyd and because the family donated land for the Boyd School), Boyd eventually settled in the Peshastin area in 1958 and began growing apples and pears. He’s still there.

Boyd decided to run for the PUD Commission in 1994 because he thought it would give him a voice in water issues affecting irrigators. He credits hard work and the alliances he developed as a member of the Peshastin-Dryden School Board years earlier with helping him win that first race. He faced no opponent in his re-election bid last year and marched straight into another six-year term.

Now he’s assigned, along with Commissioner Dave Pflugrath, as one of the two board liaisons for Rocky Reach relicensing. He says he hears the same thing about the PUD and its various issues from constituents wherever he goes: Don’t raise the rates.

Watching the relicensing process closely has been an eye-opener for him because so many stakeholders have been involved in the Lake Chelan process and because he hasn’t always seen the logic in proposals from some parties.

“The major thing the relicensing process has done is make all parties accountable to the public for their decisions,” Boyd said.

His biggest enjoyment as a PUD commissioner is being involved with so many people who are working on interesting projects.

In his leisure time, Boyd is trying to revive an interest in salmon fishing and to squeeze in some traveling with his new wife, Linda. They just celebrated their first wedding anniversary in July.

Questions or Comments?
Comments and questions on relicensing or on this newsletter can be directed to Steve Lachowicz, Chelan County PUD, 327 N. Wenatchee Ave., Wenatchee, WA, 98801. Or e-mail stevel@chelanpud.org or call toll-free in Washington: (888) 663-8121.