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January 4, 2023

### **DECISION MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** Council Members

**FROM:** Patty O'Toole and Mark Fritsch

**SUBJECT:** Letter to the Oregon and Washington Departments of Transportation Regarding Double Crested Cormorant Colony on the Astoria-Megler Bridge

### **PROPOSED ACTION**

Staff recommends that the Council send a letter to the Oregon and Washington departments of transportation to highlight concerns regarding the shift of double-crested cormorants from East Sand Island to the Astoria-Megler Bridge and the subsequent predation on juvenile Columbia River salmon and to request an update from the Oregon and Washington departments of transportation. The staff understand that management of the expanded breeding colony on the Astoria-Megler Bridge is a concern for these agencies, and we suggest an opportunity to learn more about these concerns so the Council can consider providing assistance on this concern. The draft letter will be sent to Council members by email later this week and staff will provide a copy at the Council meeting next week.

### **SIGNIFICANCE**

At the November Fish and Wildlife Committee meeting the Committee members requested that staff draft a letter to highlight the concerns with the shift of the cormorant population and to identify next steps. The staff, after consultation with various agencies proposes this draft letter to the Council for its consideration.

**BACKGROUND:**

The Council's Columbia River Basin Fish and Wildlife Program includes measures to protect salmon and steelhead from predation by marine mammals, piscivorous fish, and birds ([2014 Fish and Wildlife Program](#), page 49 and [2020 Addendum](#), page 42). Fish-eating birds, including Caspian terns, double-crested cormorants, and gulls consume a significant number of juvenile salmon and steelhead during their annual outmigration down the Columbia River to the Pacific Ocean. In November, the Council was updated on new data regarding the impact of double-crested cormorants in the estuary reach of the Columbia River, from Bonneville Dam to the Pacific Ocean, with alarming conclusions.

In November, the Council's Fish and Wildlife Committee was updated on new data regarding the impact of double-crested cormorants in the estuary reach of the Columbia River, from Bonneville Dam to the Pacific Ocean.

The presentation emphasized the shift of the double-crested cormorants' breeding colony from East Sand Island to the Astoria-Megler Bridge and upriver locations over the past several years. This shift, a result of actions by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to reduce the number of cormorants on the island, is especially problematic because their breeding and foraging at upriver sites is estimated to have far higher per capita predation rates on juvenile salmonids compared to breeding on East Sand Island. Because the abundance of marine forage fishes progressively declines upstream, double-crested cormorants breeding on the bridge and locations upstream consume more salmonids.