April 10, 2020

Lorri Gray
Regional Director, Bureau of Reclamation
1150 North Curtis Road, Suite 100
Boise, ID 83706-1234

D. Peter Hemlinger
Brigadier General, US Army Corp of Engineers
P.O. Box 2946
Portland, OR 97208-2946

Elliot Mainzer
Administrator and CEO, Bonneville Power Administration
P.O. Box 3621
Portland, OR 97208-3621

Re: Draft CRSO NEPA and Preferred Alternative

Dear Ms. Gray and Messrs. Hemlinger and Mainzer:

The State of Montana, the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, and the Kootenai Tribe of Idaho (collectively the “Upper Basin Sovereigns”) appreciate your agencies’ coordination with all stakeholders in the region to develop a multi-faceted approach to the operation and maintenance of the 14 Federal dam and reservoir projects in the Columbia River basin. As cooperating agencies, the Upper Basin Sovereigns have participated actively in the technical review of the Columbia River System Operations Environmental Impact Statement (CRSO EIS), specifically those hydro operations at Libby and Hungry Horse dams that affect resident fish, wildlife, and ecosystem processes. We particularly appreciate the resources your agencies have dedicated to working directly with us in the preparation of the CRSO EIS.

The Montana Operations at Libby and Hungry Horse balance hydropower generation, flood management, and ecosystem benefits that improve conditions for resident species and their habitats without adversely affecting downstream and anadromous species. The inclusion of the Montana Operations in the CRSO EIS and the incorporation of future science-based
improvements into this operational strategy are vital to continuing our shared progress toward improving riverine and flood plain habitats for resident fish and wildlife species. We appreciate the willingness you have shown to date to work with us to adjust annual operations and we look forward to your continued collaboration on these efforts, particularly on ways to improve flow patterns to benefit the overwinter survival of cottonwood stands and to promote burbot and sturgeon spawning and recruitment. Efforts such as these are vital in ensuring the CRSO’s ability to provide both reliable power supplies and the ecological functions so critical to our fish and wildlife resources. These operations, of course, also remain integral to current and future Biological Opinions for endangered Kootenai white sturgeon and threatened bull trout and provide a sound basis for the future Columbia River Treaty.

The Upper Basin Sovereigns and Federal Action Agencies share a long-standing interest in the sustainable management of resources affected by the Federal Columbia River Power System. We look forward to a continued productive partnership in this effort.

Sincerely,

Steve Bullock, Governor
State of Montana

Shelly R. Fyant, Chairwoman
Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribal Council

Gary Aitken, Jr., Chairman
Kootenai Tribe of Idaho