

NORTHWEST POWER PLANNING COUNCIL

COLUMBIA RIVER BASIN

FISH AND WILDLIFE PROGRAM



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Historically, salmon and steelhead migrated through much of the Columbia River Basin, an area the size of France, that includes portions of seven states and British Columbia. These fish once spawned as far upriver in the Columbia as the headwaters at Columbia Lake, British Columbia, 1,200 miles from the mouth of the river near Astoria, Oregon. Salmon and steelhead migrated up the Snake River, the Columbia's largest tributary, as far as Shoshone Falls, 615 miles from the confluence and more than 900 miles from the Pacific Ocean. The Columbia River Basin also supported numerous populations of resident fish — those that don't migrate to the ocean — and wildlife.

Beginning in the late 1800s and increasing from the 1930s on, there was a large decline of salmon and steelhead in the Columbia River and its tributaries, from an estimated peak of 10-16 million adult fish returning to the basin each year to about 1 mil-

lion in recent years. While loss of habitat, harvest, and variable ocean conditions have all contributed to this decline, it is estimated that the portion of the decline attributable to the construction and operation of hydroelectric dams in the Columbia River Basin is, on average, about 5 million to about 11 million adult fish. Hydroelectric dams also adversely affected resident fish and wildlife in the basin.

In 1980, Congress passed the Pacific Northwest Electric Power Planning and Conservation Act, which authorized the states of Idaho, Montana, Oregon and Washington to create the Northwest Power Planning Council. The Act directs the Council to prepare a program to protect, mitigate and enhance fish and wildlife of the Columbia River Basin that have been affected by the construction and operation of hydroelectric dams while also assuring the Pacific Northwest an adequate, efficient, economical and reliable power supply. The

Act also directs the Council to inform the public about fish, wildlife and energy issues and to involve the public in its decision-making.

The Council's Columbia River Basin Fish and Wildlife Program is the largest regional effort in the nation to recover, rebuild, and mitigate impacts on fish and wildlife. The Council adopted the first program in November 1982.

The 2000 program marks a significant departure from past versions, which consisted primarily of a collection of measures directing specific activities. The 2000 Program establishes a basinwide vision for fish and wildlife — the intended outcome of the program — along with biological objectives and action strategies that are consistent with the vision. Ultimately, the program will be implemented through subbasin plans developed locally in the more than 50 tributary subbasins of the Columbia and amended into the program by the Council. Those plans will be consistent with the basinwide vision and objectives in the program,

THE FOUR HS AND THEIR IMPACT ON FISH AND WILDLIFE



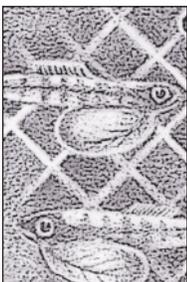
HYDROPOWER

The program recommends that resources and energy be directed away from breaching the four federal dams on the lower Snake River, recognizing that the federal government has decided breaching will not occur in the next five years (coincidentally, that is the Council's statutory planning horizon for the fish and wildlife program). Instead, the program recommends actions to improve dam-passage survival that are biologically sound and economically feasible — actions that benefit the range of species in the river and fit natural fish behavior patterns.



HABITAT

The program directs significant attention to rebuilding healthy, naturally producing fish and wildlife populations by protecting and restoring habitats and the biological systems within them. The program also recognizes the ocean as habitat and includes strategies to increase our understanding of its variable nature and, to the extent feasible, separate the effects of the ocean environment from those of the freshwater environment.



HATCHERIES

The program requires that fish hatcheries funded through the program operate consistent with reforms recommended to Congress by the Council in 1999, reforms that would shift hatchery production away from a primary focus on providing fish for harvest to also providing fish to rebuild naturally spawning populations.



HARVEST

The program promotes increased fish harvest, consistent with sound biological management practices, recognizing that harvest provides significant cultural and economic benefits to the region.

and its underlying foundation of ecological science.

The 2000 program addresses all of the “Four Hs” of impacts on fish and wildlife — hydropower, habitat, hatcheries and harvest.

In preparing the 2000 Fish and Wildlife Program, the Council solicited recommendations from the region’s fish and wildlife agencies, Indian tribes, and others, as required by the Northwest Power Act. The agencies and tribes responded, and the Council also received proposals from other interested parties. In all, the Council received more than 50 recommendations totaling more than 2,000 pages. After reviewing the recommendations, the Council prepared a draft and then conducted an extensive public comment period before finalizing the program in December 2000.

The Council’s responsibility is to mitigate the impact of hydropower dams on all fish and wildlife in the Columbia River Basin, including endangered species, through a program of enhancement and protection. As a planning agency required by law to balance fish and wildlife enhancement against impacts to the region’s hydropower system, the Council is uniquely positioned as an honest broker among the agencies, tribes, electric utilities and environ-

“Through its fish and wildlife program, the Council provides guidance and recommendations on hundreds of millions of dollars per year of Bonneville Power Administration revenues to mitigate the impact of hydropower on fish and wildlife.”

mental and business interests whose activities and legal rights involve the rivers, hydropower, fish and wildlife. In this role, the Council provides the most objective public forum to discuss and debate fish and wildlife and energy issues.

Through its fish and wildlife program, the Council provides guidance

and recommendations on hundreds of millions of dollars per year of Bonneville Power Administration revenues to mitigate the impact of hydropower on fish and wildlife. That amount is expected to increase in the future as enhancement efforts expand and accelerate. The funding is provided by Bonneville from the sale of electricity generated at 29 federal hydropower dams and one non-federal nuclear power plant in the Columbia River Basin.

The Council ensures the public accountability of these expenditures by submitting each project proposed for funding under its program to a thorough review by the region’s fish and wildlife agencies and Indian tribes, the public, and by an 11-member panel of independent scientists, the Independent Scientific Review Panel. Established by Congress, panel members are appointed by the Council from recommendations of the National Academy of Sciences.

This program, and more information about the Council, its fish, wildlife and power planning activities, and public involvement opportunities, can be found at the Council’s website, www.nwcouncil.org.

