

## **Draft report from Federal agencies shows gains for Columbia River Basin fish**

### **Local News**

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PORTLAND, Ore. - Federal agencies and their partners outlined today five years of accomplishments in improvements to hydrosystem operations and facilities, habitat rehabilitation and hatchery reforms to protect and benefit Columbia and Snake river fish.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Bureau of Reclamation and the Bonneville Power Administration - collectively known as the Federal Action Agencies - have released the 2013 draft Comprehensive Evaluation that assesses biological results under the first five years of the 2008/2010 Biological Opinion developed by NOAA Fisheries. Work under this BiOp is the largest effort of its kind ever undertaken in the Columbia River Basin.

The draft report, which is open to a 30-day public comment period, shows wild, or natural origin, salmon and steelhead returned to the Columbia and Snake rivers and tributaries and spawned in greater numbers since the first Endangered Species Act listings.

"The draft Comprehensive Evaluation shows the strides we've made to bring more fish back to the river," said Lorri Bodi, vice president for BPA's Environment, Fish and Wildlife.

Halfway through the 10-year term of the BiOp, the Action Agencies and their partners have already met or exceeded the tributary habitat goals for more than half the salmon and steelhead populations. These fish have quickly returned to re-opened habitat, spawning in greater numbers in restored reaches and increasing in abundance.

Performance testing of juvenile fish passage at the mainstem dams along the lower Columbia and Snake rivers indicate that all projects are on track to meet the BiOp performance standards of 96 percent survival for spring migrating fish and 93 percent survival for summer migrants. Part of this success is due to more efficient spill enabled by surface passages systems, such as spillway weirs, that allow fish to move past the dams near the water's surface where they naturally migrate.

"We are moving forward under the biological opinion," said Rock Peters, senior fishery program manager for the Corps of Engineers. "This draft Comprehensive Evaluation offers a great opportunity to update the region on our progress."

The draft Comprehensive Evaluation also shows the extensive coordination of efforts among federal, state and local agencies and non-government organizations to achieve gains for fish.

"The success of this program is built on unprecedented partnerships and collaboration with tribes, states, landowners, irrigators and watershed councils throughout the region," said Lorri Lee, Regional Director for Reclamation's Pacific Northwest Region. "Together, we have forged a strong commitment to increase the survival of salmon and steelhead in the Pacific Northwest."

Some of the highlights from the report include the following:

- \* Most ESA-listed fish populations that spawn in the basin have increased in abundance since their listing in the 1990s. An important measure of progress is the increase in wild salmon and steelhead returning to their spawning grounds.
- \* Some 177,227 acre-feet of water have been secured by the Action Agencies for instream uses, increasing flow to important salmon habitat. That's more than enough water to serve a city the size of Seattle.
- \* Projects geared toward fish access have opened 2,053 miles of spawning and rearing habitat to salmon - nearly twice the length of the Columbia River.
- \* Action Agencies have protected and restored 3,791 acres of estuary habitat. Fish can spend months feeding in the estuary, where they grow quickly, better positioning them to for survival in the ocean.
- \* Surface passage systems are now operational at all federal dams on the lower Columbia and lower Snake rivers, allowing fish to pass dams more quickly. Combined with refined spill operations, these systems provide some of the highest survival rates of all passage routes.
- \* A spill wall at The Dalles Dam significantly boosted survival rates in the tailrace by guiding fish into the main river channel, away from predators. Tests following the completion of the spill wall showed increased numbers of yearling and subyearling chinook passing the dam safely.

Copies of the draft Comprehensive Evaluation are available at [www.salmonrecovery.gov](http://www.salmonrecovery.gov). The document will be open for public comment from July 15 to August 16. Public comments can be submitted online at [www.bpa.gov/comment](http://www.bpa.gov/comment) or by mailing comments to: BPA Public Involvement, P.O. Box 14428, Portland, OR 97293.