



U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS – U.S. BUREAU OF RECLAMATION - BONNEVILLE POWER ADMINISTRATION

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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NOTE TO REPORTERS, EDITORS: See implementation plan and appendix for specific examples of local projects, or call for assistance.

Federal agencies announce next three years of fish protection projects

Federal agencies and their partners today outlined a [comprehensive program of habitat improvements, hatchery reforms and hydrosystem operations and improvements](#) to protect Columbia and Snake river fish.

[The document](#) describes how the agencies will boost survival of Columbia Basin salmon and steelhead listed under the Endangered Species Act. Under the ESA, the federal agencies that manage federal dams on the Columbia and lower Snake Rivers – the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Bonneville Power Administration and the Bureau of Reclamation – must minimize and mitigate the impacts of the dams on fish.



Fish slides in the spillbays to the right provide juvenile salmon and steelhead a safer ride through McNary Dam. The slides have boosted survival as the fish pass the dam near the water surface where they usually swim.

BPA

While a Biological Opinion mandates what the agencies must do, the implementation plan released today specifies exactly how they will do it. The plan commits the agencies and their tribal and state partners to make dams safer and restore degraded habitat through scientifically sound projects.

Fish passage and operational improvements at the dams remain a foundation of the agencies' actions for listed fish. For years, the agencies have spilled water at all eight lower Snake and Columbia dams during the fish passage season to help juvenile fish move more quickly and easily past the dams. Beginning in 2005, they extended spill through the end of August at Snake River projects.

The plan also outlines a broad array of projects to improve spawning and rearing habitat for listed fish. Some examples include:

- * Water purchases in central Idaho's Lemhi watershed will return water to streambeds where Snake River steelhead and Chinook salmon spawn. They will build on eight recent transactions that permanently increased upstream and downstream passage in the Lemhi for the endangered fish.
- * In Oregon's Grand Ronde watershed, partners will remove diversions and install fish passage structures to improve access to more than 45 miles of streams, and reconnect a half mile of side channel.
- * In the Upper Salmon Basin in Idaho, crews will install fish screens to keep fish out of irrigation canals, boost stream flows and remove diversions that block fish.
- * In the Tucannon watershed in southeast Washington, floodplains will be reconnected and large woody debris added to streams to increase the habitat diversity.
- * In the Columbia River estuary, more than 12 acres of saltwater wetlands will be opened up to tidal influence, restoring critical nursery areas for young fish on their way to the sea. Over time, up to 96 acres of this important fish habitat could be restored.

Under the plan, the Corps will continue to make structural improvements for fish passages at the dams. These include improved bypass structures at McNary and Little Goose dams and arrays at John Day Dam to deter bird predation on juvenile fish. A fish guidance wall at The Dalles Dam, completed in 2010, is expected to boost current juvenile survival 3 percent to 5 percent to make the dam one of the safest on the Columbia.

These efforts are producing real results for fish. The spill and structural improvements are on track to meet BiOp performance standards of 96 percent average per dam survival for spring migrating fish and 93 percent for fall migrants.

Similarly, the agencies protected 9,609 miles of wetland habitat and reopened 244 miles of streams to fish last year alone. The water transactions program has restored 4.3 million acre feet of water to streams, some of which formerly dried to a trickle at times. State biologists counted 69 Chinook salmon "redds," or nests, in 2009 after year-round flow was restored to previously dry sections of the tributaries of Idaho's Pahsimeroi River.

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