

Conservation of Columbia Basin Fish

All-H: Basinwide Salmon Recovery Strategy

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The time is fast approaching for important decisions on fish recovery in the Columbia River Basin. The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) will soon issue draft biological opinions on long-term operation of the Federal Columbia River Power System to avoid further jeopardy to species listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). At the same time, the nine-agency Federal Caucus is nearing completion of its All-H Paper for recovering salmon and other aquatic species in the basin. The All-H Paper lays out the overall strategy and specific actions to be taken in the areas of *habitat, harvest, hatcheries and hydropower* to recover the region's threatened and endangered species. The biological opinions provide more details on specific measures for the hydropower system.

The biological opinions, All-H Paper and other processes will lay the groundwork for a comprehensive federal recovery plan. While not all of the pieces are in place yet, it is clear that NMFS and the Federal Caucus will recommend: 1) measures with immediate benefits for improving fish passage at dams; 2) performance standards in all of the Hs to ensure that actions meet recovery goals; and 3) a blueprint for partnerships among the government agencies, tribes and citizens of the Northwest with a stake in species recovery.

Citizen Update #4 presents a preview of where the federal government is heading with its approach to recovering ESA-listed species. We have also included an overview of the extensive public comment received on the draft All-H Paper released late last year.

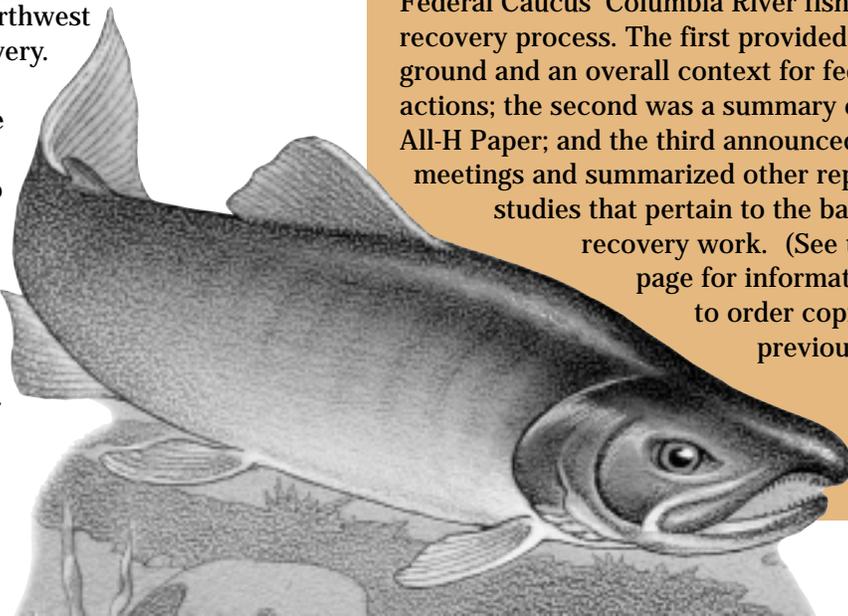
At the end of July, NMFS and USFWS released their draft biological

opinions that govern the operation of the federal hydropower system, along with a final draft of the All-H Paper to representatives of Northwest state and tribal governments for additional technical review. NMFS and USFWS plan to finalize the biological opinions in late September. At the same time, the Caucus plans to finalize the All-H Paper and a proposal for implementing the recommended actions.

An All-H Approach to Recovery

The All-H Paper addresses multiple species of fish and other aquatic creatures that inhabit the Columbia River Basin. Twelve anadromous fish species that spawn and rear in various parts of the basin have been listed for protection under the ESA. Each of these stocks is in deep trouble, and federal scientists believe the Upper Columbia chinook, Lower Snake chinook, as well as steelhead throughout the basin are in the greatest peril. Bull trout, Kootenai River white sturgeon and five species of aquatic snails in the Snake River are also listed for protection under ESA. The All-H Paper

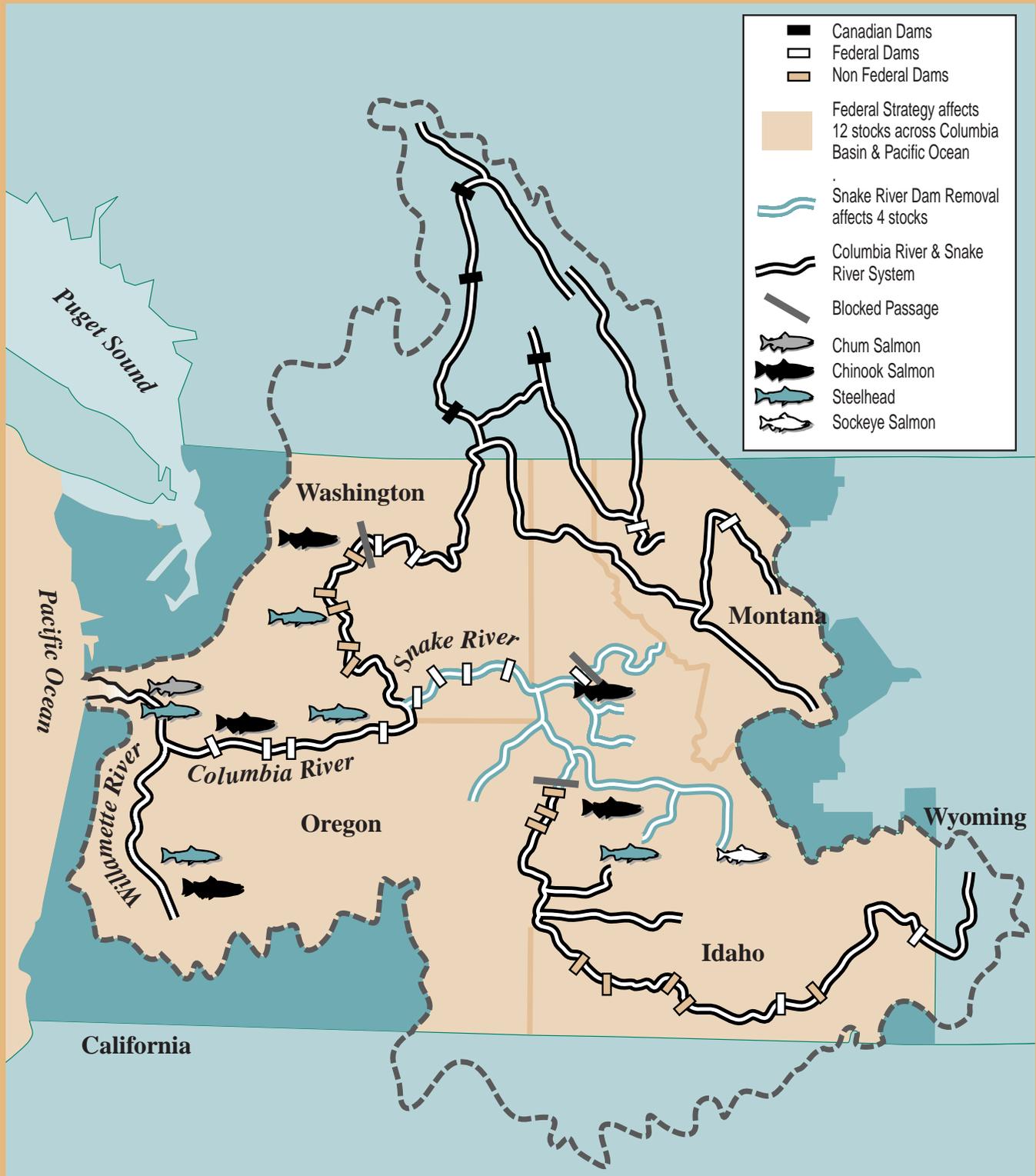
This is the fourth *Citizen Update* on the Federal Caucus' Columbia River fish and wildlife recovery process. The first provided the background and an overall context for federal actions; the second was a summary of the draft All-H Paper; and the third announced the public meetings and summarized other reports and studies that pertain to the basin's fish recovery work. (See the back page for information on how to order copies of previous *Updates*.)





Scope of Federal Salmon Recovery Initiatives

*The All-H basinwide recovery strategy impacts all 12 listed species.
Lower Snake River dam removal only affects four species.*





recommends a basinwide recovery program that places priority on actions that can be implemented quickly, are likely to provide solid and predictable benefits and will help the broadest range of species. It will also describe the long-term actions designed to have significant biological benefits.

At the outset of the All-H process, the Federal Caucus acknowledged that much of the attention in the region's salmon recovery debate has focused on breaching four federal dams on the Lower Snake River. Scientific analysis undertaken as part of the All-H process suggests that the "other Hs" – habitat, hatcheries and harvest – offer significant potential for meeting recovery goals and that a comprehensive approach offers the best hope for recovery of *all* listed Columbia Basin fish.

For salmon, NMFS used several analytical tools, primarily a tool called the Cumulative Risk Initiative (CRI) to estimate extinction risks and the benefits of various recovery actions. The analysis helped focus attention on where in the salmon life cycle the best opportunities exist for actions that would increase overall survival and lead to population recovery. The CRI results suggest that improving survival during the first year of a salmonid's life, when the greatest mortality occurs, will provide the most benefit toward recovery. That means that restoring riverine and estuary rearing habitat needs to be a vital part of the All-H Paper. The CRI also indicates that threatened and endangered salmon and steelhead are most likely to recover if conditions are improved in each life stage – freshwater spawning and rearing, juvenile migration, ocean transition and upstream adult migration. On the basis of the scientific analysis, the Federal Caucus concluded that a successful recovery effort must cover all of the Hs and cut across all life stages.

The Caucus is assembling an All-H conceptual recovery plan that will lead to significant improvements during the next five to 10 years, as well as provide a path toward long-term recovery. The Caucus has focused on a sequence of activities that would have immediate biological benefits for fish. It also lays out long-term strategies for recovery. In addition, the All-H Paper aims to balance the burdens and benefits of recovery between the upper and lower areas of the Columbia River Basin. In the upper basin, where anadromous fish passage is blocked by hydroelectric projects, the interests and concerns of local residents are different from those in downstream areas, where salmon still exist. The Caucus' All-H Paper addresses the need to respect Northwest Indian tribes' cultural resources on federal hydro-

power project lands and for keeping reservoir levels adequate for resident fish species, such as bull trout and white sturgeon.

The All-H Paper does not recommend breaching the Lower Snake River dams at this time. The Caucus appreciates that dam breaching represents to many people a highly visible way to demonstrate that the region is taking ambitious steps toward restoring salmon. And for some, it has become a litmus test for whether the Northwest is serious about wanting to bring back huge runs of salmon. But it is not an appropriate solution at this time. There is continuing scientific uncertainty about whether breaching dams is necessary to achieve recovery. Only Snake River fish would benefit directly from breaching the four dams, and there are eight other listed populations that need serious help as well. Dam removal is still on the table as an option, but the Caucus concluded it is not the place to start.

What follows is a general outline of the blueprint for recovery that is taking shape within the Federal Caucus.

Hydropower. The federal agencies have been successful in recent years modifying hydrosystem



operations to enhance salmon passage. The actions proposed in the All-H Paper for the hydrosystem will build on that success. Measures will focus on providing more natural river flows in the spring and summer, continuing to transport fish downriver in barges, improving juvenile passage by spill and other actions, improving adult passage through reconfiguring fish ladders and other facilities, meeting water quality standards, working on mainstem habitat and managing predators in the mainstem.

Habitat. The Federal Caucus believes a basinwide collaborative habitat plan that encompasses land owned by government – federal, state, tribal and local – as well as private citizens is central to any recovery plan. Many habitat fixes will take decades to yield results. It is important to invest in these long-term actions, but it is likewise

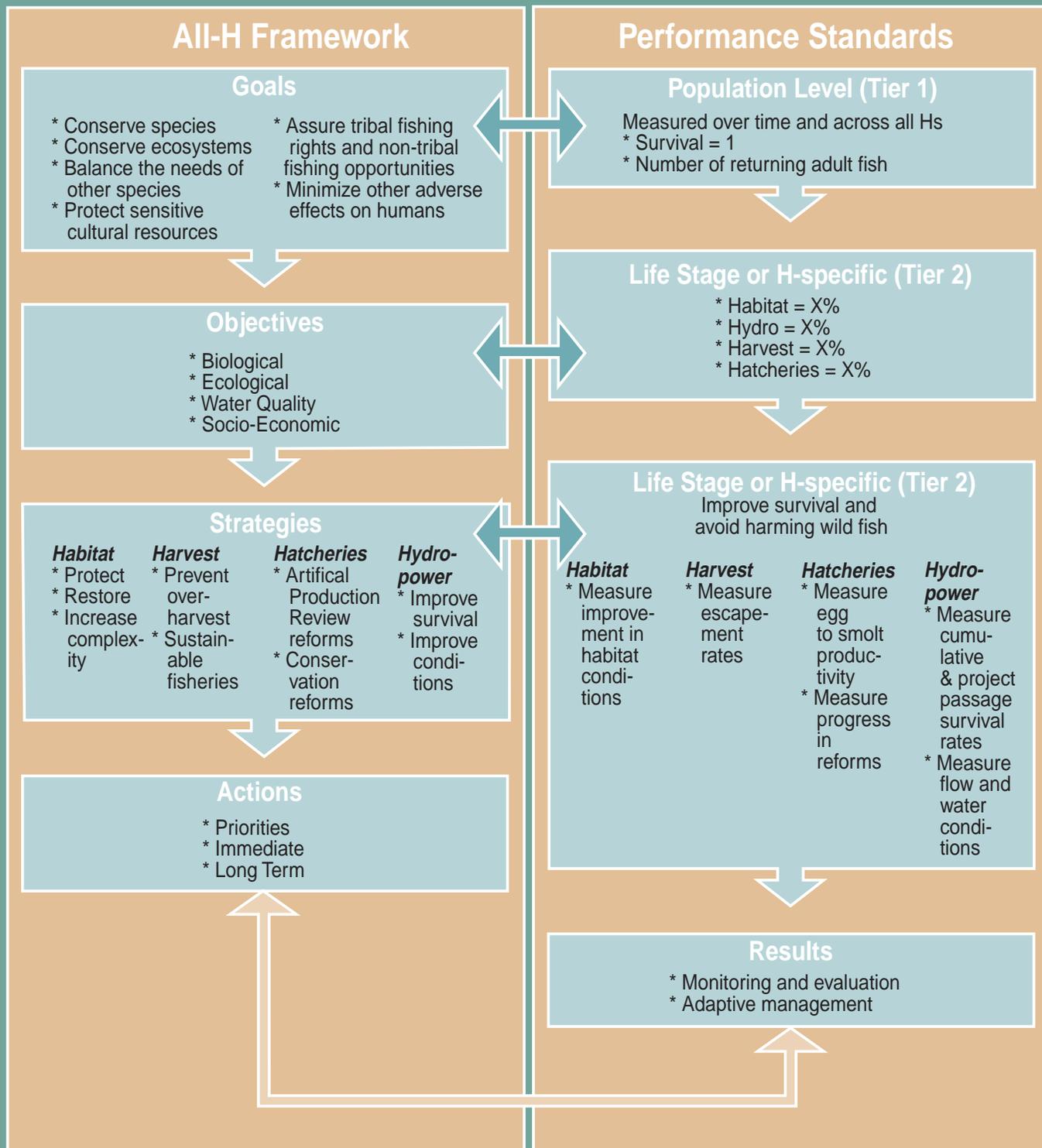


critical to do things with immediate benefits. The federal agencies will fund programs that improve tributary, mainstem and estuary habitat. The programs will specifically increase in-stream flows, remove passage barriers, screen diversions, restore



All-H Approach Summary

This chart shows the comprehensive approach to actions and accountability for basinwide salmon recovery.





water quality and protect high-quality habitats through the purchase of land or conservation easements from property owners. The All-H Paper also supports subbasin planning and setting priorities for work in specific geographic areas, as well as restoring thousands of acres of estuary habitat and tidal wetlands and flood plains.

Harvest. The conceptual recovery plan limits harvest to currently reduced levels, seeks techniques and opportunities to reduce harvest impacts on listed fish, and recommends searching out selective fishing opportunities that would not affect wild fish. Reductions in harvest can have immediate effects on the number of adult spawners,



Harvest

but harvest rates on most listed stocks have already been dramatically reduced. Although small additional gains might be made by curbing harvest, the All-H Paper recognizes the priority legal standing of tribal fishing rights and recommends allowing a level of tribal harvest that respects the federal government's trust obligations.

Hatcheries. The conceptual recovery plan contains two primary hatchery initiatives. The first is to reform all existing production and mitigation



Hatcheries

hatcheries to eliminate or minimize their harm to wild fish. Hatcheries will be required to ensure that fish they release do not pose a threat to wild fish. The second initiative is to use special hatchery conservation programs on an interim basis to avoid extinction while many recovery actions take effect. Genetics is the key to reforming hatchery operations, and the Caucus recommends that hatchery operators develop genetic management plans to minimize adverse impacts of hatchery releases on wild fish.

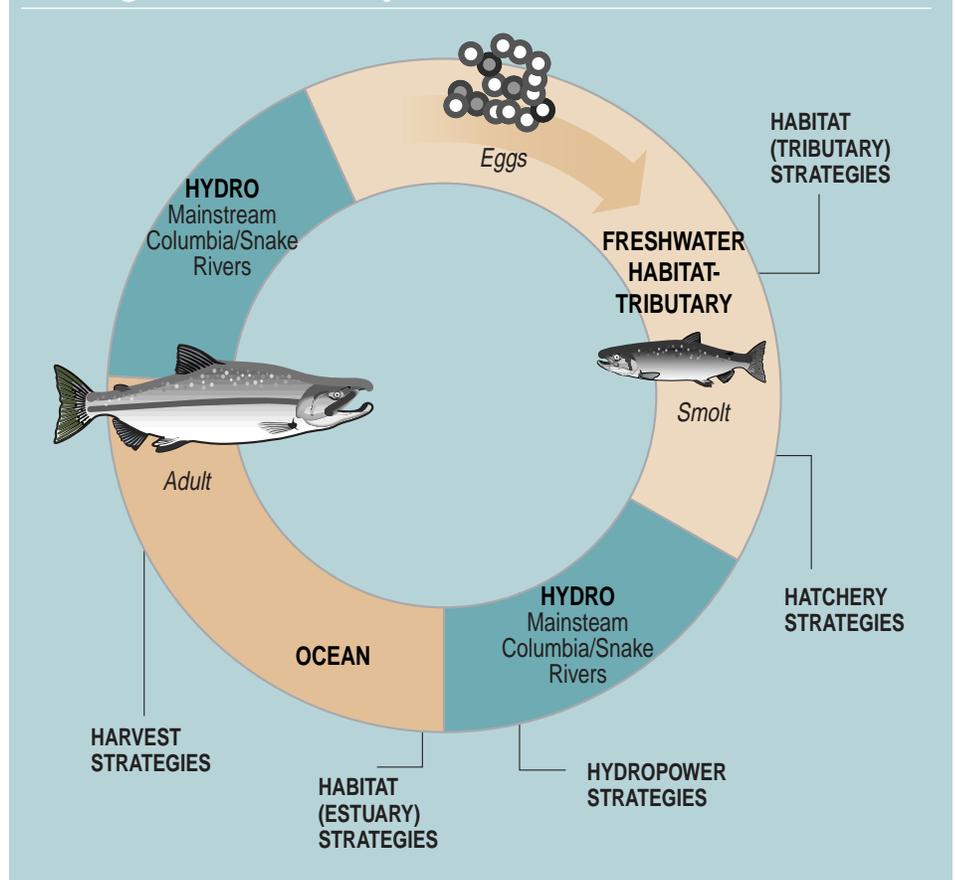
Performance Standards to Measure Results

Scientifically based performance standards will underpin NMFS' biological opinion and the All-H Paper. Performance standards provide accountability and will lead more reliably to improved survival in each salmon life stage – from smolt to adult. Performance standards are central to the All-H Paper because they provide clear objectives, measurable results and accountability.

Performance standards describe the contribution that is needed from each H at each life stage in order to achieve biological goals and objectives for recovering fish. For example, habitat and hatcheries are important at the egg and smolt life stage. A performance standard for habitat would specify how many miles of habitat need to be restored in a specific area in order to promote a healthy spawning and rearing population.

Performance standards will help determine if actions are achieving recovery goals, and if more aggressive recovery efforts are needed in the future.

Example of Setting Strategies Throughout the Life Cycle



Reasonable performance standards can help in gauging the success of various salmon recovery measures and be part of a “trigger” mechanism to signal that other approaches are needed. NMFS’ biological opinion will contain performance standards for the region to target in each of the Hs.

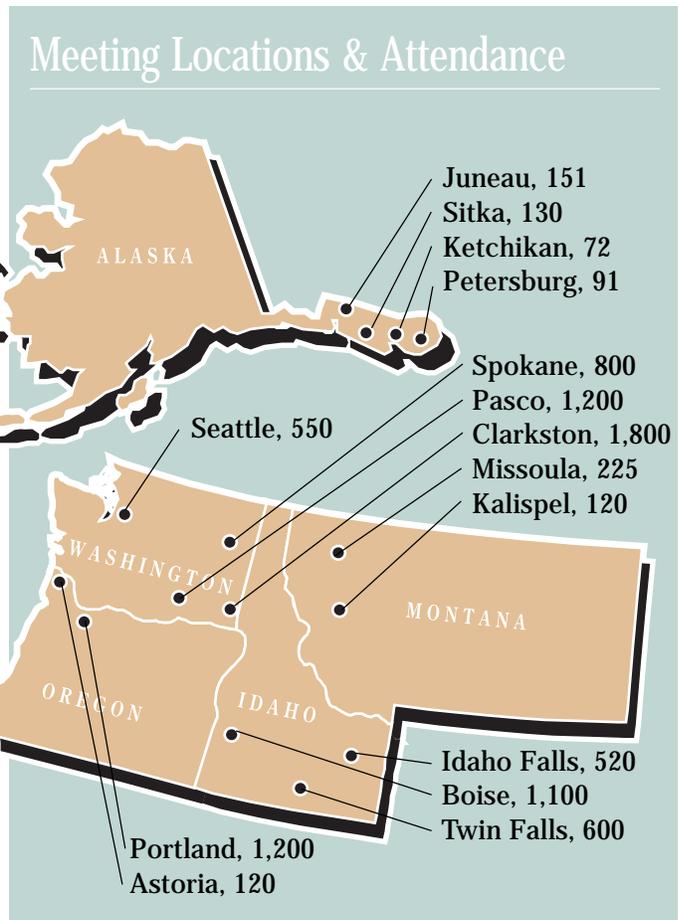
The Federal Caucus recommends a research, monitoring and evaluation program to reduce scientific uncertainties and bridge the gaps in our knowledge about how to design and implement a successful recovery program. Monitoring and evaluation will provide a consistent way to report progress.

The Public Speaks Out on the Draft All-H Paper

The All-H Paper was developed by the Federal Caucus with the input of thousands of the region’s citizens. A three-month public comment period on the draft All-H Paper began Dec. 17, 1999, and the Caucus hosted a series of 15 public meetings across five states in February and March 2000 (see map for locations) to provide an opportunity for citizens to offer their views on the All-H Paper and on the Army Corps of Engineers’ draft Lower Snake River Juvenile Salmon Migration Feasibility Report. During the comment period, we heard from over 9,000 people and received over 60,000 individual comments.

There were nearly 150 distinct issues raised during the comment period, and these were grouped into categories (see box on page 7).

The comments covered the range of topics addressed in the All-H Paper and hit upon a number of other subjects



related to Columbia River Basin economics and ecology.

Many people said that better coordination of federal responsibilities and activities through the All-H process is a step in the right direction. Others said there is still a great deal of confusion over how





Spring 1999

Federal Caucus announces formation and intent.

Summer 1999

Federal Caucus begins Cumulative Risk Initiative analyses; works with Multi-Species Framework; hosts series of public information meetings and briefings.

Summer-Fall 1999

NMFS Science Center hosts series of science and policy workshops.

December 1999

Federal Caucus and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers host public information meeting; Federal Caucus releases draft All-H Paper; Corps releases draft Lower Snake River Feasibility Study/EIS.

January-March 2000

Federal Caucus and Corps host 15 public meetings in five states and receive more than 60,000 public comments.

Spring 2000

Federal Caucus consults with states and tribes.

Summer 2000

Federal Caucus releases final draft All-H paper; NMFS and USFWS release draft Federal Columbia River Power System biological opinions to states and tribes for technical review.

Early Fall 2000

Final All-H Paper and biological opinions expected.

Fall 2000

Implementation begins

Development of the All-H Paper

The Federal Caucus worked with state and tribal representatives, the scientific community and Northwest citizens to develop a basinwide approach to salmon recovery. In late July, the Final Draft Biological Opinions and All-H Paper will go to states and tribes for technical review.

Comment Categories

- All-H Life Cycle Approach
- Conservation Goals, Objectives, Performance Measures, and Monitoring and Evaluation
- Hydropower
- Habitat
- Hatcheries
- Harvest
- Science
- Range of Alternatives
- Economics
- Institutional and Regulatory Issues
- Relationship to Corps EIS, John Day Study, BPA EIS, ICBEMP
- Biological Opinions
- Public Involvement Process
- Native American Issues
- Implementation Issues
- Issues Not Fully Considered
- Other Issues

the Caucus and a conceptual recovery plan fit into the regional salmon recovery picture. Several commenters said there is not an adequate sense of urgency in the All-H process. Others said the region still needs a comprehensive salmon recovery plan that identifies a wider range of actions than the draft All-H Paper.

Many people commended the Federal Caucus for looking at all of the Hs, but some said not all of the Hs were considered equally. Many of these people felt the paper had a bias against hydropower and dams and that the process had been reduced to debating the pros and cons of dam breaching, rather than saving salmon. But there were other people who said the Hs should not be treated equally because they have not contributed

equally to the decline of salmon. Several members of the public expressed the opinion that predation, gill-net fishing and the need to restore spawning areas and the Columbia River estuary had not been fully considered in the All-H Paper.

The Caucus appreciated the opportunity to hear from local residents and communities across the Columbia River Basin, and is considering the public comments thoroughly in completing the All-H Paper. The number of people who attended public meetings and the fervor with which they expressed their points of view demonstrated that salmon recovery is an urgent and highly charged topic in the Northwest and Alaska.

Fish and wildlife recovery efforts will touch every

community in the region in one way or another, and the Caucus has not lost sight of the fact that one of its goals is to minimize adverse effects on humans. The public



has repeatedly called for performance standards against which to measure the success or failure of various recovery measures, and the federal agencies are making standards a crucial ingredient in the draft All-H conceptual recovery plan.

Summary and Information Contacts

The Federal Caucus' All-H Paper recognizes and builds on recovery efforts that are already under way, and it will call for additional contributions from governments and individuals throughout the basin. Stream-by-stream, population-by-population and watershed-by-watershed, salmon recovery will demand comprehensive, durable and patient effort over the next several decades. Federal agency action alone will not be enough, and an unprecedented level of cooperation between state, tribal and local governments, as well as private citizens, are a crucial ingredient for success.

If you would like more information on the Federal Caucus or Columbia Basin fish and wildlife recovery, copies of the reports summarized in this publication or previous issues of the *Citizen Update*, please contact the Caucus by phone or mail. You may also visit the Web sites listed on this page for additional information.

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Web Sites

- For information on the Federal Caucus *All-H Paper*, visit www.bpa.gov/federalcaucus. This Web site lists other Internet links related to Federal Caucus activities and issues.
- For information on the Corps' *Draft Lower Snake River Feasibility Study/EIS*, visit www.nww.usace.army.mil.
- For information on the Corps' *John Day Draw-down Study*, visit www.nwp.usace.army.mil.
- For information on the Multi-Species Framework Project, visit www.nwframework.org.
- For information on the Northwest Power Planning Council's fish and wildlife activities, visit www.nwppc.org.
- For information on ICBEMP, visit www.icbemp.gov.

The Federal Caucus

In 1998, nine federal agencies formed the *Federal Caucus* to examine opportunities the region has in each of the Hs for recovering listed salmon, steelhead and resident fish. The intent was to develop a conceptual recovery plan that could guide future federal actions. The agencies of the Federal Caucus are the: Bonneville Power Administration, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Reclamation, Environmental Protection Agency, National Marine Fisheries Service, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and U.S. Forest Service.