



IDAHO FISH AND GAME -- NORTHWEST POWER AND CONSERVATION COUNCIL

BONNEVILLE POWER ADMINISTRATION



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

THURSDAY, July 22, 2010

CONTACT: Mike Keckler, IDFG, (208) 287-2870

Bill Booth, Northwest Power and Conservation Council, 208-772-2447

Michael Milstein, BPA, 503-230-4215

Idaho purchase boosts sockeye recovery

Proposed new hatchery would raise Snake River fish, provide jobs

The Idaho Department of Fish and Game has completed its purchase, funded by the Bonneville Power Administration, of a former southeast Idaho fish hatchery site with the goal of constructing a new hatchery to further boost rebounding numbers of endangered Snake River sockeye salmon.



Sockeye salmon are returning to the Snake and Columbia rivers this year in numbers not seen for decades.

NOAA

The \$4.75-million purchase comes as the most adult Snake River sockeye in at least 40 years appear headed back to the mountain streams of Central Idaho, a promising sign for a species that some had considered all but extinct. While sockeye still have a long way to go toward recovery, the proposed new hatchery should help get them there.

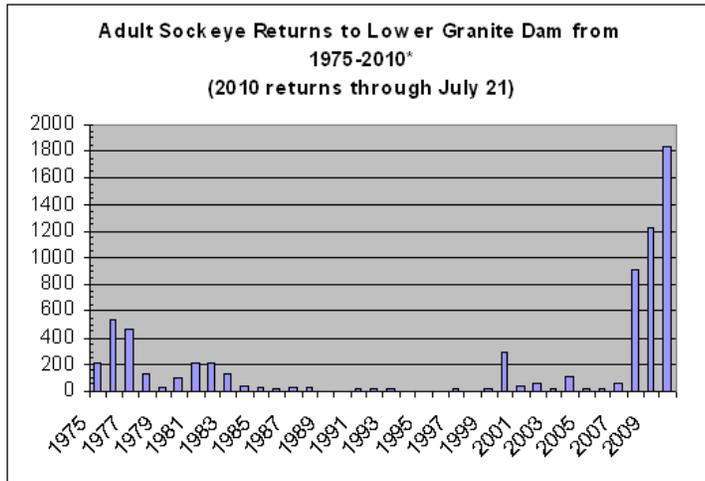
"This is an exciting time for sockeye recovery because we're not only seeing more returning fish than we have in a long time, but we also are seeing a commitment of resources to continue that trend," said Idaho Fish and Game Director Cal Groen. "There were years when some questioned whether these fish could ever make a comeback. They're showing us now that they can."

The purchase of the 73-acre parcel formerly known as the Crystal Springs Trout Farm near Springfield, Idaho, closed last week. However, that is only the first step. Idaho Fish and Game will next develop a proposal to convert the now-shuttered existing facility into a state-of-the-art sockeye hatchery that can support production of up to 1 million young fish for release into the Snake River.

"Snake River sockeye are unique and important, and their numbers are rebounding from critically low in the late 1990s to numbers today that haven't been seen since the 1950s," said Bill Booth, an Idaho member of the Northwest Power and Conservation Council and chair of the Council's Fish and Wildlife Committee. Bonneville's purchase of the hatchery is funded through the Council's Columbia River Basin Fish and Wildlife Program, which is designed to mitigate the impacts of hydropower dams on fish and wildlife. "This timely investment is a testament to years of hard work by many people through the creative, collaborative partnership our state enjoys with our tribal and federal partners," Booth said.

Sockeye declined beginning in the early 1900s when dams in the upper Salmon River blocked access to lakes where they spawn. Habitat damage and overfishing also took a toll. BPA committed in the 2008 Columbia Basin Fish Accord agreement with the State of Idaho to fund development and operation of a new conservation hatchery for sockeye, which are affected by hydroelectric dams on the Columbia and Snake rivers. This hatchery supports BPA's commitment under the 2008 biological opinion for operation of the Federal Columbia River Power System.

"This purchase is an important tool that moves us from merely preserving this species toward rebuilding it," said Bill Maslen, director of BPA's Fish and Wildlife Program. "The progress so far has come only through enduring commitments and close partnerships. We're determined to keep that going."



Returns of imperiled Snake River sockeye have increased in recent years.

FPC

BPA will complete a required environmental review of the proposal for new hatchery facilities, with opportunities for public input, before funding further development. The proposal will also undergo scientific review through the Northwest Power and Conservation Council. If it clears those reviews, construction and operation of the new hatchery would create new local jobs.

Smolts from the hatchery would be released in the Stanley Basin, where they would begin a 900-mile trip to the ocean. The trip takes them through eight dams on the Snake and Columbia Rivers, which have undergone extensive improvements to provide safer passage for fish. Projects have also restored fish habitat in the rivers and their tributaries.

The proposed new hatchery would expand a successful captive broodstock program established when the fish were listed under the Endangered Species Act in 1991. Although only 16 sockeye returned to Redfish Lake in Central Idaho through the 1990s, the numbers have since climbed. By 2008, 650 adults returned, with 833 returning in 2009. Biologists expect even more this year.

###

 [printer friendly](#)

- Powered by the PIER System -