



Sea Lions at Bonneville Dam

U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS

Background

Pinnipeds are a widely distributed and diverse group of marine mammals comprised of sea lions, walrus and seals. Historically, harbor seals (*Phoca vitulina*) hunted salmon in the Columbia River as far as The Dalles and Celilo Falls, 200 river miles from the sea, as remarked upon by Sir George Simpson in 1841: "... these animals ascend the Columbia in great numbers in quest of the salmon."

Increased Numbers

In recent years, male California (*Zalophus californianus*) and Steller (*Eumetopias jubatus*) sea lions have entered the Columbia River primarily in the winter and spring, swimming as far upstream as Bonneville Dam, 146 river miles from the Pacific Ocean. Sea lions were seen at the dam only occasionally in recent decades until 2001; however in 2002 at least 31 individuals spent March to May below the dam. That number soared to 109 in 2003; since then, the annual population has fluctuated between 80 and 125 animals, rising again in 2011 to 144.



BUILDING STRONG.



Increased Impact

The sea lions feed on white sturgeon, several salmon species and steelhead, some of which are listed under the Endangered Species Act. The Corps' own observers estimated that sea lions ate more than 4,000 salmon and more than 3,000 sturgeon in the vicinity of Bonneville Dam in 2011.

The Corps' Role

Managing the sea lion populations just below Bonneville Lock and Dam through hazing and removal has been a contentious issue between animal rights organizations trying to protect the sea lions and state and tribal fish and wildlife agencies hoping to reduce their numbers to help protect salmon runs. The role of the Corps of Engineers is limited to tracking the number of individual pinnipeds

and their predation of salmon, steelhead and sturgeon; evaluating the effectiveness of various predation deterrence activities; and keeping sea lions out of the dam's fish ladders.

We support the actions of the National Marine Fisheries Service, states and tribes to ensure the protection and continuity of native fish species. We welcome solutions to sea lion issues at Bonneville Dam that allow us to accomplish our congressionally authorized navigation, hydropower and recreation missions while meeting the salmon survival criteria spelled out in NMFS' biological opinion on the operation of the Federal Columbia River Power System.

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