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New FCRPS BiOp documents improved fish survival

“The new BiOp shows that past measures are working and that new actions will increase survival for the region’s salmon,” said Glenn Vanselow, Executive Director of the Pacific Northwest Waterways Association. “The proposed actions and the new BiOp are on the right track. It certainly looks like this new BiOp will rebuild endangered fish runs while maintaining the many economic benefits of the Columbia and Snake River dams,” Vanselow said.

The new draft Biological Opinion (BiOp) released by NOAA Fisheries today documents improved survival two ways. It shows how the improvements made over the last 25 years have led to higher survival under current operations. It also projects additional survival increases from the proposed actions of the federal agencies. Past and future increases in survival are attributed to a combination of improvements at the dams, tributary and estuary habitat improvements, reduced predation and reduced harvest.

The following are examples of the recent and future improvements:

- Current (2004-2007) survival rates for Snake River fall Chinook are 19% higher than they were from 1980-2001. NOAA estimates that survival will increase another 11% with the operations proposed for the new BiOp.
- Current survival for Snake River spring/summer Chinook is up between 23% and 72%, depending on which of the 23 tributaries are measured, compared to the 25-year base period. Proposed operations will further increase survival another 10% to 66%, depending on the tributary.
- Survival of Snake River steelhead is currently up 2% to 8% for the 25 tributaries examined compared to the base years. Steelhead survival is estimated to increase another 6% to 27% with the new BiOp actions.
- Upper Columbia River spring Chinook and steelhead show that current survival is up between 24% and more than 100%, in four tributary rivers, over the 1980-2001 base. Upper Columbia survival will further increase between 23 and 58% under the proposed actions.

The new FCRPS BiOp is a progressive approach produced by a regional effort

NOAA Fisheries (NMFS) released their new draft Biological Opinion today on the proposed actions proposed by Bonneville Power Administration, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the Bureau of Reclamation to advance recovery for Endangered Species Act (ESA) listed salmon and steelhead in the Columbia River basin. PNWA believes that this new BiOp is a science-based plan with significant improvements over previous versions:

- The draft BiOp is a collaborative approach to fish recovery. PNWA commends the scientists, tribes, states, and federal agencies for the collective effort and open communication that was put forth in creating this plan. This regional approach is essential to the recovery of ESA-listed fish while balancing the clean energy needs and vibrant economy of the Pacific Northwest.

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- The new BiOp analyzes the survival and recovery needs of fish and individually evaluates the limiting factors at all life stages of each of the thirteen ESA-listed species on the Columbia Snake River system.
- The new BiOp is an “all-H approach”, focusing on hydro, habitat, hatcheries, and harvest:
 - Hydro – Improvements to the hydro system, including water management operations, dam modifications, spill, juvenile transport improvements, and operations and maintenance activities will improve juvenile passage survival and adult returns. For example, surface bypass systems that have proven so effective at the Bonneville, Ice Harbor and Lower Granite Dams will be installed at Little Goose, McNary and John Day. These spillway weirs bring in-river survival up to 98%. In fact, as part of the continuing commitment by the federal agencies to improve juvenile survival, a 1,000 ton weir was just installed at Lower Monumental Dam last week, at a cost of \$15 million.
 - Habitat – A significantly expanded program that will protect and improve both tributary and estuary habitat based on the specific biological needs of each listed species.
 - Hatcheries – New or expanded facilities for safety net and conservation programs to promote recovery and support the implementation of hatchery reforms to reduce impacts on listed fish.
 - Predation - Expanded efforts to reduce the level of juvenile and adult salmon losses from avian, fish and marine mammal predators.

About PNWA: The Pacific Northwest Waterways Association (PNWA) is a non-partisan, non-profit organization that advocates for federal policies and funding in support of regional economic development. PNWA represents multiple industries in the public and private sectors in Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and California. Members include public ports, navigation, transportation, international trade, tourism, agriculture, forest products, energy and local government interests. Since its founding in 1934, PNWA led the way for development of economic infrastructure for navigation, electric power and irrigated agriculture on the Columbia and Snake River System. In 1971, PNWA expanded, adding Puget Sound and coastal port members to provide a comprehensive regional perspective. Today, PNWA works with the U.S. Congress, federal agencies and regional decision leaders on transportation, trade, tourism, energy and environmental policy to enhance economic vitality in the Pacific Northwest.

PNWA also represents the Inland Ports and Navigation Group (IPNG), intervenors in the BiOp lawsuit. IPNG has engaged in the lawsuit to ensure that salmon recovery needs are met in a manner that is compatible with maintaining the navigation system on the Columbia and Snake Rivers. \$16 billion in international trade moves on the Columbia River every year. The Columbia is the nation’s largest export gateway for wheat and barley. Inland barge navigation provides the lowest cost, most fuel efficient and least polluting mode of transportation to move Northwest products to market. That makes navigation good for the economy and good for the environment.

You can learn more about PNWA at www.pnwa.net.

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