

ProjectID: 198906500

Annual Stock Assessment – CWT (USFWS)

This is the USFWS response to ISRP comments on this project proposal.

1) Are these tagging programs integrated with Regional tagging plans and how were these stocks selected for including in these proposals?

The original intent of the Coded-wire Tag Program was to insure that a representative group of coded-wire tagged fish was released along with all hatchery fish released in the Columbia River Basin. In a sense, this was the first Regional tagging plan. Tag recovery at National Fish Hatcheries, included in this proposal, is also an integral component of both the basin wide and coast wide coded-wire tagging and recovery effort. Both tagging and recovery efforts conform to all know regional and coast wide standards.

When the Annual Stock Assessment (Missing Production Groups) program began, USFWS routinely coded-wire tagged fish from only four hatcheries: Leavenworth National Fish Hatchery (NFH), Spring Creek NFH, Dworshak NFH, and Warm Springs NFH. The Annual Stock Assessment program provided funding for coded-wire tagging at Kooksia NFH, Entiat NFH, Winthrop NFH, Eagle Creek NFH, Little White Salmon NFH, Willard NFH, and the Abernathy Fish Technology Center.

Through program changes, and the securing of separate funding, many of the groups originally tagged under this program are no longer funded under this project.

There are four groups of fish currently being coded-wire tagged and recovered under the Annual Stock Assessment project: Eagle Creek and Willard coho, Carson and Little White Salmon spring Chinook. These four groups are the only groups of fish released from National Fish Hatcheries in the Columbia River Basin where funding for coded-wire tagging is not provided by either the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service or other cooperators.

2) Since double-index tagging is not included in these proposals, how is the additional mortality in mass-mark selective fisheries being accounted for?

Almost all coho released from Eagle Creek NFH and Willard NFH are adipose fin clipped, including those that are tagged under the Annual Stock Assessment project. These groups of coho also contain unclipped, coded-wire tagged "double index" tags. This "double index" tagging is funded by programs other than the Annual Stock Assessment project.

Although all spring Chinook released from Carson and Little White Salmon are now adipose fin clipped to allow selective harvest of these hatchery fish, there are no "double index" tags. This is the case with spring Chinook throughout the Columbia River Basin. Recoveries of these two

stocks of spring Chinook in ocean fisheries are very rare. The vast majority of recoveries occur in either the main stem Columbia, or in terminal fisheries. This vastly limits the usefulness of double index tagging, and the regional selective fisheries evaluation group has not called for double index tagging of spring Chinook.

3) An issue not addressed in any proposal is how tagging quality is assessed, and how consistently application standards are being met? For example, how long are tagged groups held to evaluate tag loss before release? Is any effort made to inspect tagging quality (placement of the CWT, quality of fin clip, etc.)?

During tagging operations a minimum of 100 fish are sampled at least once an hour, and occasionally twice an hour. Both coded-wire tag retention and fin clip quality are checked. Tagging trailer operators identify tagging and/or fin clipping problems, and work with the individuals who actually fin clip and coded-wire tag fish to increase quality.

Final retention sampling for coded-wire tags is planned so that a minimum of 30 days has elapsed since the end of tagging. A minimum of 500 fish is sampled to determine coded-wire tag retention. The number of "tag loss days" for the last 5 brood years coded-wire tagged under this program is an average of 48 days. For those same 5 brood years a mean of 580 fish were sampled per coded-wire tag in order to determine the tag retention rate.