



2014 Columbia Basin Fish and Wildlife Program

Restoring Rivers
and Native Fish



Northwest **Power** and
Conservation Council

DOCUMENT 2015-04 MAY 2015

“The Council’s program retains the greatest geographic and biological breadth and may constitute one of the most ambitious environmental restoration efforts ever undertaken worldwide.” *Return to the River, 2000*



ABOUT US

The Act authorizes the Northwest Power and Conservation Council – an interstate compact of the states of Idaho, Montana, Oregon and Washington – to develop a plan to ensure the region an adequate, efficient, economical, and reliable power supply, along with a program to protect and enhance fish and wildlife affected by dams on the Columbia and Snake rivers. The heart of the Council’s mission is to balance these two statutory responsibilities with the goal of preserving the benefits of the Columbia River Basin for future generations.

INTRODUCTION

The Northwest Power and Conservation Council’s Columbia River Basin Fish and Wildlife Program (nwcouncil.org/fw/program) is the largest regional effort to recover and protect fish and wildlife in the nation.

Funded by the federal Bonneville Power Administration under authority of the 1980 Northwest Power Act, the program mitigates the impacts of hydropower dams on fish and wildlife. It also helps direct more than \$250 million each year to over 350 projects throughout the Columbia River Basin.

PROJECTS UNDERGO SCIENTIFIC EVALUATION

The program’s projects range from land acquisitions to protect and preserve healthy habitats; research to learn how best to rebuild naturally spawning fish populations; improvements to passage systems to assist fish movement through and around the dams; and restoration efforts to improve spawning and rearing habitats in tributaries that have been damaged by development.

A broad range of entities propose projects, including federal and state agencies, tribal governments, watershed groups, universities, private landowners, and environmental organizations. These groups also participate in the project review and selection process. To ensure accountability, all projects are required by law to undergo review by an independent scientific panel. The program also uses a second, related panel of scientists to provide advice to the region on key scientific issues, as well as an independent panel of economists to provide guidance on questions of cost-effectiveness.

The program has evolved over time from its initial focus on improving hydrosystem passage for salmon and steelhead to restoring, as much as possible, the river’s natural processes.



KEY STRATEGIES OF THE 2014 PROGRAM

Healthy Ecosystems

The program envisions healthy ecosystems that sustain abundant, productive, and diverse plants and animals. To do this, the program supports protecting and restoring natural ecological systems and biological diversity as much as possible.

Wild Fish

Wild fish are critical to preserving the genetic diversity and resiliency of salmon and steelhead. They also provide important opportunities to rebuild and reintroduce populations, with support from hatcheries.

Hatcheries

Since habitat restoration alone can't achieve the goals of the program, the Council supports fish hatcheries, managed according to current and evolving scientific principles, to help meet program objectives.

Accountability

Ecosystem management should be adaptive and experimental. Nature is a complex, evolving system, and our understanding of it is limited. It's critical then, for resource

managers to constantly improve their knowledge and adapt to new information.

Other key areas include a focus on water quality, especially the proliferation of toxics in our watersheds; a more aggressive approach to avian predators; preventing the spread of invasive species such as quagga and zebra mussels; and operational experiments at the federal dams.

TIMELINE

1980 – Northwest Power Act is enacted

1982 – First Columbia River Basin Fish and Wildlife Program adopted

1988 – Council designates 44,000 stream miles as protected from new hydropower development

1991-2005 – 13 species of salmon and steelhead and two species of resident fish, bull trout and Kootenay River white sturgeon, are listed for protection under the Endangered Species Act

1996 – Congress passes an amendment to the Act charging the Council to conduct a public and scientific review of projects proposed for funding

2000 – Return to the River, the first independent scientific review of the Council's program, calls for a shift from the program's emphasis on individual measures to a holistic, ecosystem-based foundation

2004 – Council adopts local subbasin plans based on habitat measures

2014 – Strong returns for sockeye, fall Chinook, and coho continue favorable trends



KEY PRIORITIES OF THE 2014 PROGRAM

- Ensure effectiveness of ongoing projects
- Learn from new information and adapt accordingly
- Support efforts to address predation; reduce toxic contaminants; and prevent the spread of non-native and invasive species
- Explore opportunities to increase upper Columbia Basin salmon through reintroduction into blocked areas; enhancing fish passage; and habitat improvements
- Address passage and research needs for sturgeon and lamprey
- Continue updating local subbasin recovery plans to inform efforts
- Improve floodplain habitats

BACKGROUND

Historically, the Columbia River Basin has supported a rich variety of fish and wildlife, including abundant runs of salmon and steelhead. Spawning as far upriver in the Columbia as the headwaters at Columbia Lake, British Columbia, fish migrated up the Snake River, the Columbia's largest tributary, as far as Shoshone Falls, 615 miles from the confluence and more than 900 miles from the Pacific Ocean. Before the 1800s, annual runs were believed to have numbered between 11 and 16 million fish, but declined to about 1 million by the 1990s. Over time, the impact of development, recreation, logging, mining, agriculture, navigation and the generation of hydroelectric power have all combined to disrupt the habitat of fish and wildlife in the basin.



851 SW SIXTH AVE, SUITE 1100 | PORTLAND, OR 97204-1348
WWW.NWCOUNCIL.ORG | 503-222-5161 | 800-452-5161