
ECOSYSTEMS

They're more complex than you think.

Nature is so complex. Nearly every element in a natural ecosystem plays a part in the endurance of that system. Knock one element out of its place, and there is a biological shuffle among all the other elements. It has been said that "ecosystems are not only more complex than we think, they are more complex than we *can* think."

River systems are no exception. The same river may flow through deserts and rain forests. It may stem from a lake on the side of a mountain, but cross marshes and pour into an ocean.

The complexity of our river systems has been magnified many times by the necessity to make rivers serve society. In today's world, rivers glide through, and even under, cities and towns. They are both the source of drinking water and the conduit for sewage disposal. Industries drain wastes into them and children dive in for a swim. We demand much of our rivers, and we have taken much from them. Most of the time we have failed to comprehend how intricate and, in some ways, how delicate our rivers are.

In the watershed of the Columbia River, *people* have become the most critical element. Throughout most of the river's drainage, people have built up a society and altered the ecosystem. Now people must improve the ecosystem that remains.

The problem is, we don't know how to re-weave the fabric of a natural system. And the whole cloth of the Columbia Basin has been cut and shaped to suit the growth of this region.

Our Columbia River Basin Fish and Wildlife Program recognizes that more than a third of the region's native habitat has been lost to development. Our goal is to ensure that we salvage what we can of that habitat and protect it.

We have looked carefully at the life cycles of the fish and wildlife we address and have developed a set of actions to improve conditions at every stage of those life cycles. We stress coordination to increase the benefits of individual actions and reduce the likelihood of redundancy. Most importantly, we approach this work with the attitude that it is a learning experience. We can best educate ourselves and improve our basin by proceeding and, at the same time, monitoring our progress. We call on program implementors to think of themselves as weavers of ecosystems.

Northwest Power Planning Council's 1994 - Columbia Basin Fish & Wildlife Program

