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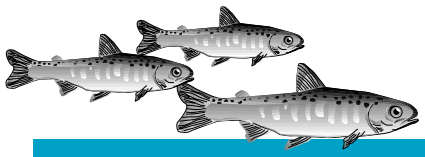
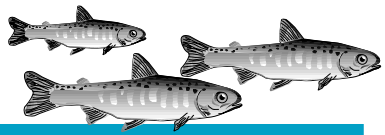
Walla Walla District

Lower Snake River Juvenile Salmon Migration Feasibility Study





AUGUST 1999 NEWSLETTER NO. 7

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) is conducting a feasibility study of ways to improve juvenile salmon migration through the hydropower system on the lower Snake River. The study focuses on how the lower Snake River dams can be changed to improve survival and recovery prospects for Snake River salmon stocks listed under the Endangered Species Act.

Study Update

By Greg Graham, Corps Project Manager for the Study

Significant Milestone Reached

In July, the feasibility study team reached a significant milestone. Not only are the majority of technical analyses complete, but the corresponding technical reports and a preliminary version of the feasibility report/environmental impact statement (FR/EIS) were submitted to Federal agencies and to independent technical teams for review. Meeting this internal review date means that we currently are on schedule for release of the Draft FR/EIS and its accompanying technical appendices to the public in Fall 1999. However, meeting this schedule will not be easy. It depends heavily on the number and scope of comments received from the agencies and independent review teams. Release of this document this fall will kick off a public review period that will end with a series of formal public hearings scheduled for early next year.

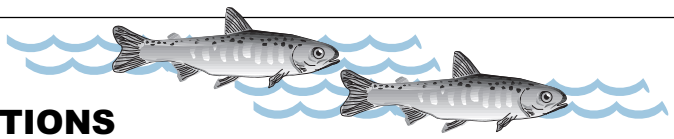
We have reached this first step towards a formal public policy decision document thanks to years of significant efforts by many team members, including Corps employees; technical work groups; contractors and subcontractors; Federal agencies; and state, local, and tribal government representatives. All are to be commended for their hard work and dedication. With continued strong efforts from the feasibility study team, we are pushing towards identifying a preferred course of action to improve salmon and steelhead migration through the lower Snake River dams. This will be documented in the Draft FR/EIS.

Regional Coordination

As will be described more fully on page 2 of this newsletter, the Corps continues to work with others in the region to develop and analyze alternative management plans for fish and wildlife resources of the Columbia-Snake River Basin. In terms of an overall improvement in species survival throughout the basin, the Lower Snake River Juvenile Salmon Migration Feasibility Study is only part of the picture. We are developing ways to coordinate our process with other entities by sharing valuable technical information as everyone moves closer towards a common vision on salmon recovery and on the related actions of the Columbia-Snake River System.

The Corps' recent regional coordination efforts include expanding the range of community forums. Senator Michael Crapo observed that the original range of communities lacked the perspectives of the Southern Idaho communities which would suffer potential effects from flow augmentation. The Corps agreed and contracted with the University of Idaho (U of I) to conduct nine additional forums in June in Southern Idaho. Thanks are due to the U of I staff for responding so quickly and professionally to our request for the additional meetings. More information regarding this last round of community forums is provided on page 3 of this newsletter.

Commonly Asked Questions



Question:

Isn't it true that fall chinook would benefit greatly from breaching because of the additional mainstem rearing and spawning habitat it would create?

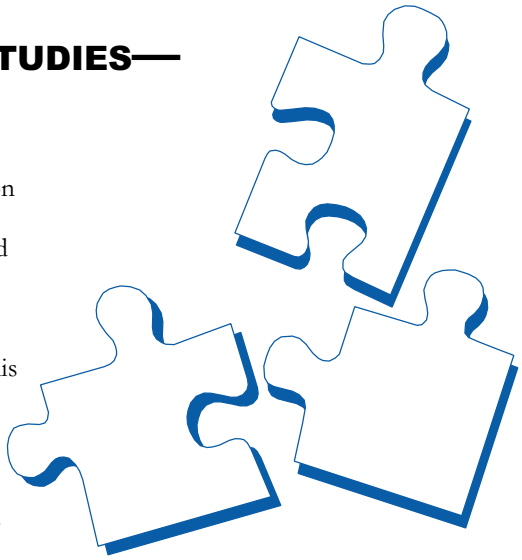
Answer:

It is true that dam breaching could benefit fall chinook by increasing potential mainstem rearing habitat and spawning habitat by 20 to 25 percent. However, we don't have enough reliable historical information to determine the likely actual amount of this habitat that would be used. Consequently, we don't know if fall chinook would benefit "greatly" or slightly. Three things contribute to this difficulty in predicting habitat use: 1) we don't have a lot of data on the historical use of the lower Snake River for fall chinook rearing and spawning; 2) what we do know indicates that most historical fall chinook spawning occurred upstream of the lower Snake River project area; and 3) what we do know about historical rearing seems to indicate that, due to high summer temperatures in the lower Snake River, fall chinook may have moved downstream of the Snake River to rear.

FOCUS ISSUE

Columbia-Snake River Basin Studies—

How Do They Fit Together?



Defining the various processes in place to develop plans for the restoration of fish and wildlife resources in the Columbia-Snake River Basin, and understanding the relationships between those processes, can be complicated and confusing. There are overlapping mandates, jurisdictions, strategies, research, and review efforts that contribute to this confusion. However, each process does have its place and purpose. The agencies and stakeholders involved are working hard to cooperatively fit all the pieces of the puzzle together in a way that creates the most comprehensive picture of historical conditions, current conditions, and potential scenarios for improving future conditions in the basin. The following paragraphs describe two of the major players in the regional effort—the Federal Caucus and the Multi-Species Framework—and how their efforts fit together with other regional studies.

Federal Caucus

The Federal Caucus brings together nine Federal agencies that are involved in various aspects of management of the Columbia-Snake River System. Several of these Federal agencies are or will be involved in Endangered Species Act (ESA) consultations on operations and configuration of hydropower facilities on the Columbia-Snake River System. To prepare for the ESA consultations and to ensure regional coordination and representation, the Federal Caucus was formed by National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), the Corps, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Bureau of Reclamation, Bonneville Power Administration, Environmental Protection Agency, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Forest Service, and Bureau of Land Management.

The Corps, BoR, and BPA have specific responsibilities under the ESA to prepare a Biological Assessment on proposed operation of the Federal Columbia River Power System (FCRPS) that may affect listed species. NMFS and USFWS then issue Biological Opinions. For example, the Corps' Lower Snake River Juvenile Salmon Migration Feasibility Study (feasibility study) is being conducted because of the 1991-92 ESA listings and the 1995 and 1998 Biological Opinions issued by NMFS regarding listed salmon species on the lower Snake River. The Corps' feasibility study is a very detailed snapshot of possible alternatives for addressing the effects of the Lower Snake River Hydropower Project on listed salmon and steelhead species. This study feeds into the Federal Caucus process, which is more of a panoramic view of how to improve conditions for multiple listed species in the entire Columbia-Snake River Basin.

The Federal Caucus plans to synthesize technical work products from existing processes and studies such as the Multi-Species Framework (described below), the Corps' feasibility study, and other ongoing regional ESA consultation efforts to produce a Draft Four-H Paper this fall. This paper will develop alternative proposals for Federal hydropower operation on the Columbia-Snake River System as a whole, as well as consider other factors affecting endangered species—habitat, harvest, and hatcheries. The scope of the Federal study is intended to cover ESA-listed salmon, steelhead, westslope cutthroat, bulltrout, snails, and Kootenai River white sturgeon. The Federal Caucus plans to conduct public involvement efforts after release of the Four-H Paper to seek public comment on the alternatives, as well as on the technical information and conclusions relied on from the Multi-Species Framework, the Corps' feasibility study, and other ESA consultation efforts. These public involvement efforts will be coordinated with the Corps' public involvement efforts after release of the Draft FR/EIS in Fall 1999.

In addition, the Federal Caucus aims to work with the region to help identify areas of consensus, and ultimately to lead to broader regional agreement on the future management direction for Columbia-Snake River Basin resources. To facilitate this regional communication and coordination with the four Northwest states and the Columbia Basin Tribes, the Federal agencies are participating in the Columbia River Basin Forum, which contains representatives from each of these stakeholders. The Forum (formerly known as the Three Sovereigns) serves as an accessible arena where all parties can bring alternative management approaches forward for discussion.

Multi-Species Framework

The Multi-Species Framework process was initiated by the Northwest Power Planning Council (Council) to provide the technical information needed as the Council fulfills its obligation under the Northwest Power Act to amend its Fish and Wildlife Program. The Council's Fish and Wildlife Program covers a broad spectrum of Columbia-Snake River Basin fish and wildlife concerns in addition to the ESA-listed species addressed by the Federal Caucus. The framework process was initiated in response to scientific reviews which suggested that the region's fish and wildlife program would benefit from a science-based framework that would help guide policy choices while recognizing the interrelated parts of the basin's ecosystem.

To fulfill this goal, the framework is developing a set of alternatives for future management of the basin and will analyze the biological, social, and economic effects of the alternatives. These alternatives consider all four Hs and will be presented and evaluated in a report prepared by Fall 1999. Federal agencies, Tribes, states, and Council staff and stakeholders participated in the development of the alternatives and are participating in the analyses through work groups. Input was also solicited throughout the region through public involvement and outreach activities. The results of the framework process will be factored into the Four-H paper for the Federal Caucus and they will also guide the Council's efforts in amending the Fish and Wildlife Program.

Regional Coordination Update

Corps Conducts Additional Community Forums

The Corps contracted with a team of social scientists from the University of Idaho (U of I) to conduct 9 additional community forums (representing 10 communities) in Southern Idaho in June. As part of the Corps' social assessment for the FR/EIS, the U of I already conducted 17 community forums throughout the region to meet with a cross-section of affected communities. The products of all 26 community forums (representing 28 communities) will provide valuable input into the Social Resources section of the Draft FR/EIS.

The additional community forums—all in Idaho—were conducted in Salmon, Ashton, Firth, Rupert, Twin Falls, Bliss/Hagerman, Homedale, Boise, and Cascade. Close to 300 people attended the forums (see table). The Corps extended the scope of the community forums to these southern Idaho communities. Without the timely observation by Senator Michael Crapo, the Corps may have missed an opportunity to gain the perspectives of these communities, particularly in regards to the potential effects of flow augmentation measures. These communities are an important part of the overall social assessment. The specific towns were selected as representative communities because of their population size, economic diversity, relationship to the river, and geographic location.

Community members with diverse perspectives gathered at each forum to participate in a 4-hour, structured, interactive workshop aimed at identifying their perceptions of potential social and economic impacts associated with the three major study pathways under consideration.

Southern Idaho Community Forum Participant Totals

Town	Date	Number of Participants	Number of Public Observers*	Total Attendance
Salmon	6/14	33	0	33
Ashton	6/14	13	8	21
Firth	6/15	15	21	36
Rupert	6/15	21	7	28
Twin Falls	6/16	18	18	36
Bliss/Hagerman	6/17	21	12	33
Homedale	6/17	9	2	11
Boise	6/21	49	10	59
Cascade	6/22	15	0	15
Total		**194**	**78**	**272**

* Only members of each specific community were invited to participate in that community's forum; people from other communities were classified as public observers. Public observers were, however, invited to provide written comments.

For More Information

Corps Places Study Fact Sheets on Home Page

The Corps is working to create and post fact sheets on their home page that provide a brief (2 pages each) summary of the technical reports that have been prepared for the feasibility study. Five of these fact sheets have been completed and posted under the feasibility study at http://www.nww.usace.army.mil. The Corps plans to add more fact sheets as they become available.

The five completed fact sheets summarize the Draft Recreation and Tourism Analysis, produced by the Recreation Workgroup of the larger Drawdown Regional Economic Workgroup (DREW); the Draft Tribal Circumstances/Perspective Analysis Report, produced by the DREW Tribal Circumstances Workgroup; the Transportation Analysis, produced by the DREW Transportation Workgroup; the Water Supply Analysis, produced by the DREW Water Supply Workgroup; and the Power System Analysis, produced by the DREW Hydropower Impact Team.

Other information regarding the study and upcoming public involvement opportunities can also be accessed at the Corps' home page, and by contacting our Public Involvement Coordinator, Dave Dankel, at dave.a.dankel@usace.army.mil, or 509-527-7288.

US Army Corps
of Engineers®
Walla Walla District
201 North 3rd Avenue
Walla Walla, WA 99362-1876

Study Milestones

☑ = *Task already completed*

☑	Notice of Intent	June 1995
☑	Scoping Meetings	July 1995
☑	Interim Status Report	December 1996
☑	Regional Roundtable Workshops Initiated	April 1997
☑	First Set of Public Information Meetings	September 1997
☑	Second Set of Public Information Meetings	November 1998
☑	NMFS Release of Draft Anadromous Fish Appendix	April 1999
☑	Complete Technical Analysis (Economics, Engineering, Biological, etc.)	June 1999
☐	Federal Agency/Independent Review Period	July 1999
☐	Distribute Draft EIS	October 1999*
☐	Public Review of Draft EIS (90 days)	October 1999 to January 2000*
☐	Formal Public Hearings	January 1999*
☐	Distribute Final EIS	To Be Determined
☐	Sign Record of Decision	To Be Determined

* These projected dates are tentative.