US Army Corps of Engineers®
Walla Walla District

Lower Snake River Juvenile Salmon Migration Feasibility Study

JULY 2000 NEWSLETTER NO. 9

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 migration prospects for Snake River salmon stocks listed under the Endangered Species Act.

Study Update

By Greg Graham, Corps Project Manager for the Study

Overwhelming Feedback

There is no doubt that the region is extremely interested in the outcome of the Feasibility Study. We received approximately 200,000 comment documents (letters, faxes, written comments, e-mails, petitions) during the 120-day public comment period that ran from December 17, 1999 to April 30, 2000. The original end of the comment period was March 31, 2000. It was extended due to requests from interested parties. In addition, about 9,000 people attended 15 public meetings throughout the region (page 2).

We have heard from all sides of the issue. Documents range from signed form letters to multiple-page, detailed comment letters from agencies, tribes, organizations, and individuals.

We are in the process of cataloguing all the comment documents and reviewing each for content. We are also reviewing transcripts from the public meetings. We want to emphasize that every comment received will be considered, regardless of whether it was submitted by one individual or repeated by thousands.

Comment Response

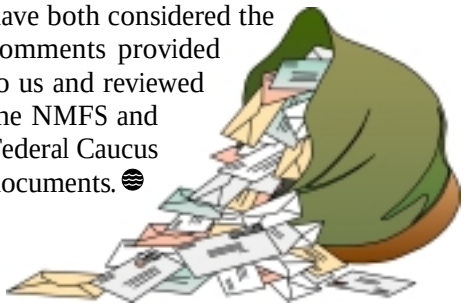
As we evaluate each comment document, primary importance is placed on the content of the comment and how it relates to the Feasibility Report/Environmental Impact Statement (FR/EIS), rather than on the number of times we receive it.

Your written comments and oral comments will be used to identify key issues that will be addressed in a comment/response document and considered in the next version of the Lower Snake River Juvenile Salmon Migration FR/EIS. Common themes raised by several groups and individuals will be addressed collectively. Unique, detailed comments raising specific concerns about the content and/or analysis in the FR/EIS will be addressed more directly.

The comment/response process may lead to additional technical analyses and corresponding updates in the FR/EIS. Throughout the process, we will continue to be involved in regional coordination efforts.

The Corps is currently evaluating whether it would be wiser to produce a Revised Draft FR/EIS with a preferred alternative for public comment before going to a Final FR/EIS, or to just go directly to a Final FR/EIS. If an additional version of the document and the associated public comment process would yield little new substantive information, the public interest may be better served by going directly to a Final FR/EIS without further delay and expense. We had hoped to release the next version of the document to the public in October 2000. However, this deadline will not be attainable due to the challenges of processing the enormous volume of comments received. We will keep you posted when a deadline is set.

In addition to considering public comment on the FR/EIS, our process will consider the recommendations made in the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Biological Opinion and the Federal Caucus report, both slated for release this summer. Be assured that the Corps has not eliminated any of the FR/EIS alternatives from consideration at this point. We will not revise the alternatives or make any recommendations on the future of the lower Snake River dams until we have both considered the comments provided to us and reviewed the NMFS and Federal Caucus documents.



Thousands Attend Public Meetings

The series of public meetings on the FR/EIS, John Day Drawdown Study, and the Federal Caucus' Conservation of Columbia Basin Fish All-H Paper attracted large numbers of individuals with diverse perspectives on salmon recovery issues. A total of nearly 9,000 individuals attended a series of 15 public meetings around the region last February and March.

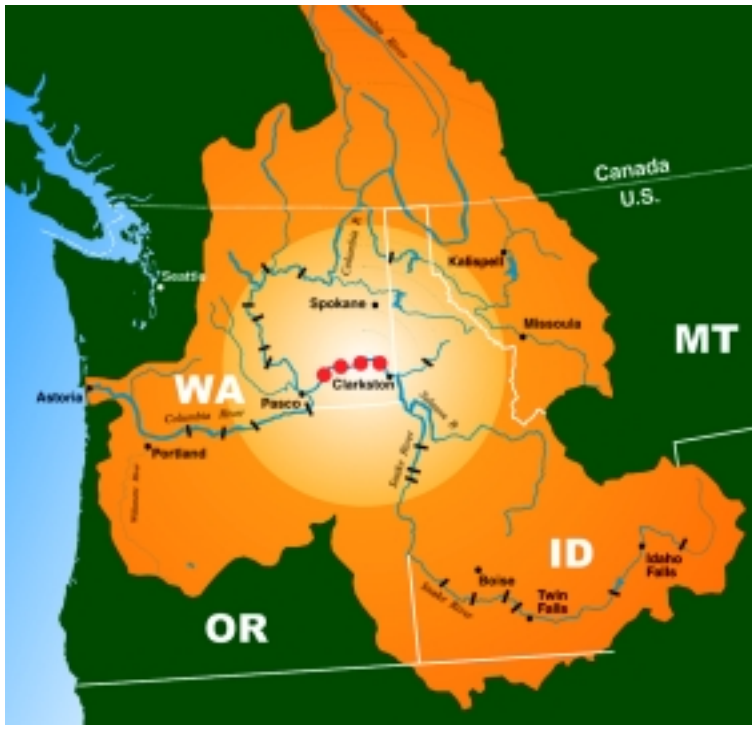
About 1,500 people provided oral or taped comments. The atmosphere and content of the comments varied at each location, but people at each meeting voiced strong convictions and corresponding concerns.

The Clarkston, Pasco, Portland, and Boise meetings generated the most attendance. Even the smallest meeting in Ketchikan, Alaska was attended by more than 70 people. The Clarkston, Wash., meeting was televised and broadcast locally to meet the level of interest in that area.

Most meetings consisted of an open house, a presentation by the Corps on the FR/EIS and the John Day Drawdown Study, a presentation by a Federal Caucus representative on the All-H Paper, a question-and-answer session, and a public comment session. All participants were invited to make written and oral comments. Oral comments were limited to three minutes in length. At some of the meetings, the attendance was so large that not all those wishing to speak were able to do so. At some locations, participants could attend either an afternoon or evening session.

Location	Date	Number of Attendees
Portland, Ore.	2-3-00	1200*
Spokane, Wash.	2-8-00	800*
Clarkston, Wash.	2-10-00	1800*
Astoria, Ore.	2-15-00	200
Pasco, Wash.	2-17-00	1200*
Boise, Idaho	2-23-00	1100*
Seattle, Wash.	2-29-00	550*
Kalispell, Mont.	3-1-00	120
Missoula, Mont.	3-2-00	225
Idaho Falls, Idaho	3-7-00	520
Twin Falls, Idaho	3-8-00	600
Ketchikan, Alaska	3-6-00	72
Sitka, Alaska	3-7-00	130
Juneau, Alaska	3-8-00	151
Petersburg, Alaska	3-9-00	91
	Total:	**8,759**

* An afternoon and an evening session were held at this location.



Lower Snake Dams
Columbia River Basin
Other Dams

For More Information

The Walla Walla District home page has been updated. Visit us at www.nww.usace.army.mil. Under the Feasibility Study, check out Public Outreach, Public Meetings for a description of the public meetings, meeting transcripts, meeting attendance, and a copy of the Corps' presentation.

Also under the Feasibility Study, click on Information Sheets to view summaries of technical information on a variety of topics related to the FR/EIS. The Corps is in the process of updating and adding to these information sheets. Check back regularly for new material. A sample information sheet on sedimentation is enclosed with this newsletter. When you are finished checking out the Feasibility Study area of our home page, be sure to take advantage of our links to other sites of interest.

To request more information about the study or to be added to the study mailing list, visit the home page, e-mail dave.a.dankel@usace.army.mil, or call Dave Dankel, Public Involvement Coordinator, at 509-527-7288.

Spring Chinook Run is Strong

The region received some encouraging news regarding wild spring chinook salmon, which is one of the four lower Snake River anadromous fish species listed under the Endangered Species Act. The number of wild and hatchery spring chinook salmon passing Bonneville Dam on their way upstream this year was the highest since counts began in 1938.

How Do This Year's Counts Compare?

This year's adult spring chinook run was 4.6 times greater than the 1999 run and 2.9 times greater than the 10-year average. Counts at Bonneville Dam show that 199,595 adults have passed the dam as of May 31.

Early counts of adult summer chinook at Bonneville suggest that the strong run will continue. Based on counts from the first two weeks of June, this year's adult summer run (which officially began on June 1), is 3.8 times greater than the 1999 run and 2.6 times greater than the 10-year average.

The fish passage count at Bonneville Dam is not a perfect measure of run strength because it occurs after a portion of the fish are taken through ocean harvest and lower river harvest, but it does provide a good basis for comparison. For instance, although this year's count is higher than in 1972 when 186,000 fish passed the dam, it is likely that many more fish actually returned to the mouth of the Columbia that year. Harvest was not as restricted then as it is now, so more fish were removed from the ocean and lower river before they could be counted at Bonneville. To put this year's encouraging returns in historical perspective, it is estimated that the Snake River Basin produced about 1.4 million chinook salmon prior to the arrival of Euro-Americans (Northwest Power Planning Council, 1986).

Generally 80 to 90 percent of the returning fish are hatchery produced. Later this summer, scientists will survey tributaries to count redds (nests) and perform other analyses to determine how many fish were wild.

How Do Returns Look in the Near Future?

This year's strong jack run indicates that the upward trend in adult spring-summer chinook returns may continue in 2001 and 2002. "Jacks" are spring-summer chinook that return as 2 or 3 year olds, after spending only 1 year of their life in the ocean. Chinook salmon usually spend 2 to 3 years in the ocean before returning to spawn at 4 to 5 years old. Jack counts are often an indicator of the magnitude of following years' returns. This year's spring chinook jack run of more than 21,000 fish was almost 8 times greater than the 10-year average.

What Has Caused the Higher Returns?

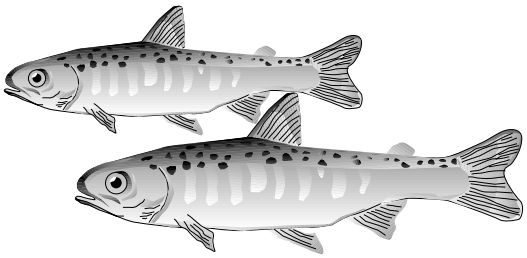
The fish counts and related data on habitat conditions and other factors are preliminary and have not been fully analyzed, so it is difficult to determine what has caused the resurgence. However, it is possible to speculate that improvements in ocean conditions over past years in turn improved the survival prospects of spring chinook. Another factor could be that the returning adults experienced strong spring flows during 1996 and 1997 when they were migrating to the ocean as juveniles. That eased down-river passage and may have improved their survival chances. A recent U.S.-Canada fishing agreement that has limited ocean harvest of these fish, and improvements in dam passage technology could also be contributing to the increased spring chinook returns.

What Do the Improved Counts Mean for the FR/EIS?

While they are encouraging, these new data are raw and have not been thoroughly studied. Regional scientists will examine the possible factors that could have contributed to the increased returns, and the confirmed data and scientific analysis will be considered as part of the ongoing FR/EIS.

Want More Information?

For more information on this year's returning fish counts, visit the Fish Passage Center website at www.FPC.org or the Walla Walla District home page at www.nww.usace.army.mil. At the Walla Walla site, click on Feasibility Study, Adult Fish Counts to access year-to-date counts and other fish count information.



Two Important Documents Expected Soon

Two major documents related to salmon recovery efforts and hydropower operations in the Northwest are scheduled for release the last week of July. The recommendations in both these documents will be considered in the Corps' FR/EIS.

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) will release the 2000 Draft Biological Opinion on the operation of the Federal Columbia River Power System. This report will include recommendations on any changes NMFS determines are necessary in the operation of the Lower Snake River Hydropower Project.

The Federal Caucus, a group of nine Federal agencies involved in salmon recovery efforts in the region, will issue the Draft Comprehensive Basinwide Federal-State-Tribal Salmon Recovery Strategy. This report is expected to synthesize the findings of the "All-H" Process that evaluated alternatives for salmon recovery covering harvest, hatcheries, habitat, and hydropower issues, and to outline a 10-year comprehensive recovery plan for the region.

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FAST FACTS on the Comment Period:

- The end of the comment period was extended from March 31, 2000 to April 30, 2000.
- We received almost 200,000 comment documents.
- Nearly 9,000 people attended 15 public meetings.
- The Clarkston meeting was televised and broadcast locally.

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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
☑	Public Information Meetings	September 1997 and November 1998
☑	NMFS Release of Draft Anadromous Fish Appendix	April 1999
☑	Complete Technical Analysis	June 1999
☑	Federal Agency/Independent Review Period	July 1999
☑	Distribute Draft FR/EIS	December 1999
☑	Public Review of Draft FR/EIS	December 1999 to April 2000
☑	Public Meetings on the Draft FR/EIS	February/March 2000
☐	Process Comments and Develop Responses/Revisions	2000
☐	Distribute Revised Draft or Final FR/EIS	2001
☐	Public Review of Revised Draft or Final FR/EIS	2001
☐	Sign Record of Decision	To Be Determined