

Contact: Diana Cross, Public Affairs Officer, (208) 378-5020

The Willamette River Basin Project Biological Opinion and Reclamation's Water Marketing Program

One of the authorized purposes of the Willamette River Basin Project (Project) is the storage and release of water to downstream users who have contracts with the Bureau of Reclamation for irrigation use. The subsequent diversion of water by Reclamation's contractors can adversely affect Upper Willamette River Chinook and steelhead and their habitat by reducing stream flows and by entraining juveniles into water diversions.

In its biological opinion on the Project, NOAA Fisheries has identified measures to minimize the effects of diversions by Reclamation's contractors on listed species and their habitat. These measures include limiting the total amount of stored water that can be provided under contracts; requiring existing contract diverters to install screens and other fish passage devices within a specified timeframe; requiring screening of all new contract diversions; ensuring that water released to serve contracts does not prevent meeting minimum flow objectives; and reducing the volume of stored water diverted by contract holders in low water years to ensure minimum objectives are met.

In addition, no new contracts will be issued in the North and South Santiam rivers. Diminished flows have been identified as a limiting factor in the North and South Santiam river basins. This curtailment effectively protects these rivers from further flow reduction and habitat degradation.

The overall purpose for these measures is to avoid jeopardizing listed species and to avoid destroying or adversely modifying their critical habitat while also allowing for continued water marketing and contracting by Reclamation to meet current and future irrigation needs in the Willamette River Basin.

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