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NOAA Fisheries Issues Federal Columbia River Power System Supplemental Biological Opinion

PORTLAND, Ore. – NOAA Fisheries today confirmed that improvements at federal dams on the Columbia and Snake rivers, rehabilitation of habitat, and other actions are benefiting federally protected salmon and steelhead as much as or more than anticipated five years ago.

The finding came in a NOAA Fisheries supplemental biological opinion issued today that reaffirmed the effectiveness of NOAA's 2008/2010 biological opinions (BiOp) for salmon and steelhead affected by the operation of the Federal Columbia River Power System (FCRPS). The supplemental BiOp analyzed research and monitoring results from the first five years of work under the original biological opinions.

"This supplemental biological opinion confirms we are on the right track when it comes to ensuring the survival of salmon and steelhead species in the Columbia River system now and well into the future," said Will Stelle, West Coast Regional Administrator for NOAA Fisheries. "Lots of hard work and collaboration across the region made this progress possible."

Biological opinions determine if a federal action such as the operation of the FCRPS is likely to jeopardize the continued existence of a species listed under the ESA. If an action is found to jeopardize a species, a Reasonable and Prudent Alternative (RPA) is developed detailing actions to avoid the likelihood of jeopardizing the continued existence of listed species or resulting in the destruction or adverse modification of critical habitat.

NOAA Fisheries issued a biological opinion for the FCRPS in 2008 with a RPA outlining more than 70 actions necessary to protect 13 ESA-listed salmon and steelhead species through 2018. In 2010 NOAA Fisheries reexamined and reaffirmed the 2008 biological opinion, further strengthening it with an Adaptive Management Implementation Plan that accelerated and enhanced mitigation actions.

However, a Court Remand Order in 2011 required more specific identification of habitat actions for the 2014-2018 period and a reexamination of the 2008/2010 biological opinions. Today's supplemental biological opinion addresses the remand order and may be found online at http://www.westcoast.fisheries.noaa.gov/fish_passage/fcrps_opinion/federal_columbia_river_power_system.html

Specifically, today's supplemental biological opinion:

- Addresses the Court's Remand Order by identifying specific tributary and habitat actions through 2018.
- Verifies that effects of the RPA actions will be as or, for some populations, more beneficial than anticipated in the 2008 FCRPS Biological Opinion.
- Determines the best science available was used by the action agencies (The Army Corps of Engineers, Bonneville Power Administration and the Bureau of Reclamation) for determining the efficacy of their habitat actions.
- Finds the adaptive management components of the RPA have performed as expected, facilitating more efficient and effective implementation.
- Concludes that the 2008 FCRPS Biological Opinion analysis and conclusions, as supplemented in 2010, remain valid; and that the RPA, as amended, is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the listed species and destroy or adversely modify designated critical habitat.

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