

# factsheet

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## The Snake River dam study: then and now

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers spent seven years studying Snake River dam removal. The final environmental impact statement, released in 2002, evaluated four alternatives to help Snake River fall chinook get through the dams.

The independent peer-reviewed study concluded that dam breaching by itself would not recover the fish, would take the longest time to benefit fish listed under the Endangered Species Act and would be the most uncertain to implement of any of the alternatives. And, only four of the 13 ESA-listed fish in the Columbia Basin pass the Snake River. Dam breaching in the lower Snake would do nothing to help the other nine.

The study's preferred alternative was major improvements to fish passage at the dams.

### Since 2002, some things have changed

*Aggressive nonbreach strategies are being implemented and survival through the dams has improved*

- In 2002: The Corps had installed a "fish slide" at one of the dams, allowing more efficient and less stressful passage for the juvenile fish.
- Today: There are fish slides at Lower Granite and Ice Harbor dams, and fish slides are planned for installation at Lower Monumental and McNary dams in 2007. Water is spilled over the dams to help the juvenile fish get past, and survival is 90-95 percent at each dam.

### Fish returns have dramatically improved

- In 2002: The region was just starting to see some of the largest returns of adult salmon

and steelhead since the first dam was built on the Columbia.

- Today: The trend has continued. The five-year average for 12 of the 13 listed stocks in the Columbia Basin is up significantly from the time they were listed. The most improved is wild Snake River fall chinook – from 700 returning adults at listing in 1992 to the most recent five-year average return of more than 4,900 wild fish.

### *Power replacement costs have increased*

- In 2002: The Corps EIS estimated \$271 million annually to replace the lost hydroelectric power.
- Today: With today's high power costs, the range is more like \$350 million to \$500 million – every year.

### *Concerns about air emissions have escalated*

- In 2002: The Corps EIS assumed that the electricity from the lower Snake River dams would be replaced with a natural gas plant.
- Today: The costs of natural gas have skyrocketed. Replacing hydropower with a coal plant would put millions of tons of carbon dioxide into the air – every year.
- Today: As in 2002, breaching dams would force more polluting forms of transportation to replace barges that currently transport millions of tons of wheat and grain each year on the Snake River from several states to the Pacific Rim.

