Overview of the Draft 2013 Supplemental Federal Columbia River Power System Biological Opinion

Background

The 2008 Federal Columbia River Power System Biological Opinion (FCRPS BiOp) described a comprehensive series of actions to improve the status of 13 salmon and steelhead species throughout their life cycle. The suite of actions, called the Reasonable and Prudent Alternative (RPA), included among other things hydropower passage, estuary and tributary habitat, hatchery and predation management improvements needed to avoid or minimize harm to the species and their habitats. The actions would occur over a 10-year period, through 2018. The RPA also included an adaptive management framework to monitor and adjust implementation as necessary to achieve survival improvements identified in the 2008 FCRPS BiOp.

The FCRPS BiOp was updated in 2009 to improve monitoring of potential uncertainties and to establish contingency measures should fish abundance decline. In 2010, NOAA Fisheries reexamined and validated the 2008 conclusions in a Supplemental Biological Opinion. This 2013 Draft Supplemental FCRPS BiOp addresses a 2011 Court Remand Order requiring more specific identification of habitat actions planned for the 2014–2018 period and requiring NOAA Fisheries to reexamine the 2008/2010 Biological Opinions.

NOAA Fisheries and the FCRPS Action Agencies work closely with sovereign State and Tribal governments to implement the FCRPS BiOp.

Development of the 2013 Draft Supplemental FCRPS BiOp

NOAA Fisheries reviewed implementation progress described in the FCRPS Action Agencies' Draft 2013 Comprehensive Evaluation to assess whether the RPA actions are occurring as intended in the 2008 FCRPS BiOp. NOAA Fisheries also evaluated the prospective actions described in the Draft 2014-2018 Implementation Plan. NOAA Fisheries determines that the program of improvements is on track, although much work remains to be done by 2018.

The FCRPS Action Agencies identified specific habitat actions for implementation between 2014-2018 and used the best available science to determine their efficacy. By identifying the factors limiting habitat productivity, and by implementing actions that decrease the impact of those limiting factors, habitat function will improve. This, ultimately, will improve the freshwater survival of salmon and steelhead.

NOAA Fisheries evaluated whether the effects of implementing the RPA habitat actions and habitat projects for the 2014-2018 period are reasonably certain to occur. The FCRPS Action Agencies have built significant capacity to implement projects based on successful partnerships, resulting in broad institutional and stakeholder support for implementation. The adaptive management framework ensures that the objectives, as outlined in the 2008 BiOp, are met by 2018. They have laid out credible strategies for achieving performance standards, and associated survival improvements, for the affected salmon and steelhead.

NOAA Fisheries considered new scientific information, such as the current biological status of the fish, to assess whether new information showed any significant discrepancies from expected results.

Draft Determination

NOAA Fisheries proposes to determine that the RPA, as described in the 2013 Draft Supplemental FCRPS Biological Opinion, is likely to achieve the survival improvements anticipated in the 2008 FCRPS BiOp. Therefore, the 2008 FCRPS Biological Opinion conclusions remain valid and the operation of the FCRPS is not likely to jeopardize the listed species or adversely modify their critical habitats. NOAA Fisheries now seeks comments from State and Tribal partners to ensure that all relevant information is considered in this 2013 Draft Supplemental FCRPS BiOp.

How to Review Draft Supplemental Biological Opinion & Submit Comments

The 2013 Draft Supplemental FCRPS Biological Opinion and overview materials are available at:
http://www.nwr.noaa.gov/hydropower/fcrps_opinion/federal_columbia_river_power_system.html

Please submit comments to NOAA Fisheries by October 7, 2013.

Email comments to: 2013DraftFCRPS@noaa.gov