



Federal Caucus News

Bonneville Power Administration, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation

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Columbia Basin fish recovery efforts on track

PORTLAND, Ore. – Efforts to recover Columbia River Basin fish are on track and expected to meet the National Marine Fisheries Service's biological opinion objectives for 2003, say officials with the Bonneville Power Administration, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Bureau of Reclamation. With today's release of the 2001 ESA Implementation Plan Progress Report, the three federal agencies provide a snapshot of actions taken over the past year to help recover threatened and endangered fish.

"Under less than optimal conditions, a lot was accomplished in 2001," said BPA Administrator Steve Wright. "Substantial progress was made toward achieving structural improvements to benefit endangered fish. Despite the second worst water year in recorded history, adult survival through the dams was the best ever and juvenile survival, with the exception of some steelhead stocks, was within the range recommended by scientists as necessary to avoid extinction."

To be successful in recovering fish listed under the Endangered Species Act, the NMFS biological opinion relies on achieving improvements in the areas of habitat, hatcheries, harvest and the Federal Columbia River Power System.

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Hydropower actions include improving juvenile and adult passage at mainstem dams, managing the river to protect salmon nests and young migrating fish, and providing improved water quality. During 2001, due to low water and poor river migration conditions, 90 percent of Snake River fish and about 50 percent of Columbia River fish were transported in barges.

Habitat actions in the Columbia River Basin include securing increases in water quantity during critical migration periods, improving fish passage by diverting fish away from irrigation systems and acquiring and protecting habitat at risk of being degraded.

Hatchery actions include work on Hatchery and Genetic Management Plans intended to improve the operations and management of hatcheries to reduce potential harm to endangered fish stocks.

Harvest actions include programs to encourage use of more “tangle-tooth” and “floating trap” nets to aid release of wild fish incidentally caught with hatchery fish.

“We are proud of the progress made in this first year and are confident that 2002 will build on these initial efforts,” said Ken Redde, deputy regional director, Bureau of Reclamation.

There were a few projects that the agencies delayed in 2001. Among these were development of a removable weir at John Day Dam, implementation of operational alternatives at Libby and completion of a comprehensive strategy for marking hatchery fish to allow regional coordination. The agencies expect to be able to move ahead with these improvements in 2002.

Another promising sign from last year was the near-record numbers of adult fish returns in 2001, with large runs again expected for this year.

“We haven’t seen such large numbers of returning Snake River fish since 1938 when Bonneville Dam was built,” said Brig. Gen. David Fastabend, Northwestern Division Engineer, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. “There are a number of contributing factors – great ocean conditions and good freshwater conditions in the early lifecycle for these fish, improved passage for young fish and changes in river operations.”

In December 2000, the National Marine Fisheries Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service issued biological opinions that described a multi-year program for fish recovery requiring changes in the areas of habitat, harvest, hatchery and hydropower.

This was the first year of a 10-year program to further the recovery of listed fish.

For more information or to view the progress report, go to the Federal Caucus Web site at: www.salmonrecovery.gov.

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