Historic Cooperative Agreements to Ensure the Protection of Columbia River Salmon and Maintain Clean, Renewable Energy Source for Pacific Northwest Citizens

Recent Action

This week, Commerce Secretary Don Evans notified officials from the Chelan and Douglas County Public Utility Districts (PUDs) that their proposed Habitat Conservation Plan has been approved. The two PUDS, the State of Washington, the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, and NOAA Fisheries, signed a historic agreement to ensure that their hydro projects will not adversely impact mid-Columbia salmon and steelhead runs. The Chelan PUD and Douglas PUD have worked cooperatively with the State, the Colville Tribe, and NOAA Fisheries, to develop a 50-year program to minimize the impact of the three dams to salmon and steelhead by improving fish bypass systems and hatchery programs, and funding locally-led habitat restoration work. This agreement underscores the Bush Administration's support for clean, affordable power using hydroelectric dams and for collaborative performance-based approaches to recover salmon and steelhead. The agreement comes at a time of significantly improved salmon and steelhead returns in the Pacific Northwest.

Background

In 1993, the Public Utility District No. 1 of Chelan County (Chelan PUD) and Public Utility District No. 1 of Douglas County (Douglas PUD) began negotiation and development of Habitat Conservation Plans (HCPs) to allow continued operation of the Rocky Reach, Rock Island, and Wells Dams located in North Central Washington, but also improve fish passage and survival conditions for Upper Columbia River salmon and steelhead listed under the Endangered Species Act. The PUDs, in consultation with NOAA Fisheries, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the State of Washington, Native American tribes and other regional interests, developed a 50-year program to ensure that the three hydro projects are not likely to jeopardize threatened or endangered salmon and steelhead.

The HCPs apply to spring, summer and fall chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus kisutch),* sockeye salmon *(O. nerka),* coho salmon *(O. kisutch),* and steelhead *(O. mykiss)*. The biological plan is comprised of three components: (1) survival standards for species migrating past the hydroelectric projects; (2) hatchery and tributary plans for mitigation of unavoidable mortality; and (3) land use and other critical actions that impact either survival standards of the species or the effectiveness of the Agreements.

In 1998, the National Marine Fisheries Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife Service, the Confederated Tribes of the Colville, Yakama, and Umatilla Reservations, American Rivers, the PUDs, and many other local, state and federal dignitaries met to recognize the good faith efforts of the parties to reach agreement on the HCP.

In 1999, implementation of the HCPs were included as a key recommendations of the Basinwide Salmon Recovery Strategy by the federal caucus as a means to improve survival of Columbia River salmon and steelhead.

NOAA Fisheries has completed the three biological opinions and Section 10 permits under the Endangered Species Act, which will allow the HCPs to move forward and facilitate relicensing of

the dams through the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC), as well as meet PUD obligations under the Federal Power Act, the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act, the Pacific Northwest Electric Power Planning and Conservation Act and other federal and state laws.

Improving Fish Passage Survival

The overall project survival goal for adult and juvenile salmon through the hydroelectric projects is 91 percent. To compensate for scientific uncertainties, the HCPs set an even higher standard for juvenile salmon survival — 95 percent. Different methods will be utilized at each dam to meet the survival goals set in the HCP, and coordinating committees have been established to oversee the standards and implementation of the fish passage survival improvements, including a juvenile bypass system, a state-of-the-art surface collector and other techniques to guide migrating juvenile salmon past the dams.

Improving Salmon Habitat

The PUDs have committed in the HCPs to help protect important habitat necessary to salmon and steelhead by establishing a Tributary Conservation Committee to fund projects for the protection and restoration of habitat within the watersheds of the Columbia, Okanogan, Methow, Entiat, and Wenatchee Rivers in north central Washington. The PUDs will contribute financial resources annually to fund these projects, as well as an assessment program for monitoring and evaluating the performance of the projects.

Hatchery Supplementation

The HCP provides that PUDs will fund hatchery facilities to be operated and maintained by the PUDs or a designated agent, such as the State of Washington. A Hatchery Committee composed of voting representatives appointed by signatories to the HCP would oversee the development, implementation and monitoring of hatchery programs. The HCP anticipates that hatchery programs will greatly contribute to the recovery of these salmon runs.

Clean, Renewable Energy Source

Providing electric service since the 1940's, Chelan County PUD and Douglas County PUD own and operates the nation's second largest nonfederal, publicly owned hydroelectric generating system. The PUDs' hydroelectric generating projects have a combined total generating capacity of over 2,000 megawatts of low-cost, clean, and renewable power. The three projects have the capacity to produce about 2,750 megawatts of clean, efficient, and renewable power, enough to meet the needs of a city of more than 1,300,000 people.