

1.0 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In this report, NOAA Fisheries presents analyses completed to identify the potential for actions implemented offsite to mitigate for effects resulting from the annual operation of the Federal Columbia River Hydropower System (FCRPS). The key question addressed was whether there is potential to improve anadromous salmonid population status through improvements to habitat conditions in tributary or estuarine environments.

Here NOAA provides results for eight ESUs considered to be significantly affected by operation of the FCRPS in the 2000 FCRPS BiOp (NOAA Fisheries 2000). Those ESUs are Snake River steelhead (threatened), Upper Columbia River steelhead (endangered), Mid-Columbia River steelhead (threatened), Snake River spring/summer chinook (threatened), Upper Columbia River spring chinook (endangered), Snake River fall chinook (threatened), Snake River sockeye (endangered), and Columbia River chum (threatened).

1.2 BACKGROUND

Even with survival improvements in fish passage at and between dams, significant mortality associated with FCRPS/U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (USBR) operations will continue to occur. For some ESUs, additional non-hydro mitigation for habitat, hatcheries, and harvest, as appropriate, may be needed to avoid jeopardy. Action Agency implementation of measures in these other areas will increase the certainty and reliability of attaining the increased status of listed ESUs. In the event that non-hydro mitigation is warranted to offset hydrosystem mortality, a key step is determining the potential benefits that could accrue from actions implemented to improve habitat in tributary and estuary systems and their effects on the status of salmonid ESUs. Amendments by the Action Agencies to the FY2004-2008 Annual Operating Plan precipitated a refinement of the 2000 FCRPS Biological Opinion's evaluation of the potential of offsite actions mitigate for the amended annual operations of the hydropower system.

Non-hydro mitigation provided by the Action Agencies will not preclude the need for improvements in habitat, hatcheries, and harvest by other Federal or non-Federal parties, nor will it diminish the obligation of these other parties to seek improvements in furtherance of Section 7(a)(1) or Section 7(a)(2). Non-hydro mitigation is intended to complement, not displace, actions by other entities to address habitat, hatcheries, and harvest. Where there are overlaps between non-hydro mitigation activities of the Action Agencies and the responsibilities of other Federal and non-Federal entities, costs and implementation responsibilities should be shared and coordinated, as appropriate.