



## Hydropower and Fish and Wildlife Issues

February 2016

### Value of Hydropower in the Northwest

Hydropower from the Federal Columbia River Power System is a key economic driver for jobs in the Northwest. This efficient and renewable resource provides low-cost power without carbon emissions.

Hydro provides over 60% of the region's electrical generation capacity, and it makes up almost 90% of the generation within the Bonneville Power Administration's resource portfolio. As such, it is the primary resource used to serve electricity to the millions of customers of publicly and cooperatively owned utilities in the Northwest with preference rights to federal power.

The hydropower system in the Northwest also provides other key benefits that are part of our economy and way of life. These include provision of critical flood control, irrigation, navigation, and recreation.

### Fish and Wildlife Considerations

PPC has long supported cost-effective actions to protect and enhance fish and wildlife in the Columbia River Basin, and has worked within the regional processes to advance alternatives that are scientifically sound and economically prudent.

*Investments Paying Dividends*— Since 1980, BPA customers have invested over \$15 billion in Endangered Species Act and other statutory fish and wildlife obligations (not including other efforts that utilities fund in addition to the BPA programs). Because BPA recovers all of its costs through rates, PPC members have contributed an enormous amount towards salmon recovery and wildlife mitigation in the region. **About 30% of the power cost charged by BPA is attributable to fish and wildlife measures.**

While there is room for further efficiency and improvement, these efforts are showing significant success. Twelve of the thirteen ESA-listed salmon and steelhead populations in the Columbia River Basin are showing striking improvement, and there are more salmon and steelhead returning now than at any time since the first federal dams were constructed in 1938. **An estimated 2.27 million adult salmon and steelhead returned past Bonneville Dam in 2015.** The most recent 10-year average return for salmon and steelhead was 1.6 million fish.

New measures and infrastructure have increased survival of fish passing through the federal hydro system. In addition, spawning and rearing habitat has improved in many tributaries, and hatchery

programs are being modified to reduce impacts on wild fish. Long term, the strength of these populations is increasingly dependent upon continued improvement of ocean conditions, reduced harvest of wild fish, and adequate protection of available habitat.

### **NOAA Supplemental BiOp**

In January, 2014, NOAA Fisheries released the latest iteration of the Federal Columbia River Power System Biological Opinion (FCRPS BiOp). We are pleased that the updated salmon plan continues to emphasize the best available science to protect listed species and continues the path of progress seen over the past decade.

The updated plan:

- Meets the U.S. District Court’s requirement that NOAA submit an amended plan that specifies additional habitat action.
- Builds on the success of the existing plan, which NOAA found has yielded positive results.
- Does not result in further significant degradation of the generating capability of the FCRPS.

Plaintiffs in the BiOp proceedings again filed suit and the latest iteration of the BiOp was litigated in 2015. The region is awaiting Judge Michael Simon’s ruling on the filings.

### **Dam Breaching Efforts Continue to be Misguided**

Dam breaching advocates are again waging a campaign to remove the four lower Snake River dams. They inaccurately describe these as “deadbeat” dams that provide no benefit to the Northwest. Their position overstates the impact these projects have on fish, and ignores the beneficial power, irrigation, shipping, and recreational opportunities provided by these projects. Other points on this topic include:

- Removal will not significantly increase fish survival through the Lower Snake River. Current juvenile fish passage survival rates are at or near 95% at all four dams.
- Removal will not significantly improve access to historic spawning areas. These dams inundated only 10% of the historic fall chinook spawning habitat in the Snake River, and spring chinook, sockeye and steelhead were even less affected.
- These dams only affect 4 out of 13 Endangered Species Act (ESA) listed salmon and steelhead stocks in the Columbia River Basin.
- Removing these dams would have a significant negative impact on our economy and environment by eliminating about 1,020 average megawatts of carbon-free energy, increasing greenhouse gasses by 4.4M tons/yr, and reducing navigation capacity.

**In summary: the framework of the current collaborative process for Northwest salmon is working as it should. Fish runs remain high and juvenile survival targets have been met or are close to being met. New extreme measures would be harmful and are not needed to achieve regional goals.**