



## Hydropower and Fish and Wildlife Issues

September 2015

### 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 \$14 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 plenty of 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 2.7 million adult salmon and steelhead returned past Bonneville Dam in 2014. 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 have again filed suit and the latest iteration of the BiOp will be litigated in 2015.

## **Proposed 10-Year Experimental Spill Test Fatally Flawed**

Over the past two years, some parties have sought to radically increase the current program of spilling water over the dams. On proposal was for a 10-year experimental test to dramatically increase spill at all eight federal projects in the FCRPS. The proposed test would:

- Increase the total dissolved gas cap beyond state and federal limits to levels that could seriously harm or kill salmon and other aquatic species.
- Cost ratepayers more than \$1 billion to implement at a time when many residents already struggle to pay their electricity bills.
- De-rate the hydro system by another 600 average megawatts (beyond the 1,000 average megawatts lost already under current spill agreements), thereby threatening system reliability and hampering the ability to integrate intermittent resources.
- Add 1.9 million additional tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere from combustion turbines needed to replace lost hydro generation.

That spill proposal was based on a study that has been found fundamentally defective during independent review, and NOAA Fisheries rejected the proposal from inclusion in the BiOp because of substantial weaknesses in the analysis and numerous harmful effects. The above statistics are from a preliminary analysis released by the Bonneville Power Administration.

***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.***