



## **Fish and Wildlife Issues**

March 2010

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 support alternatives that consider the impacts of mitigation actions on the Northwest economy.

### **Investments Paying Dividends**

Since 1980, BPA has invested over \$11 billion on its Endangered Species Act and other statutory obligations to fish and wildlife. 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 one-third of their entire wholesale power bill supports these priorities.

While there is plenty of room for efficiency and improvement, these efforts are showing success. Both wild and hatchery adult salmon and steelhead numbers are trending up in the Columbia River Basin.

Changes in dam configuration have increased survival of fish passing through the federal hydro system, land-use practices have improved for better spawning and rearing habitat in some tributaries, and hatcheries 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.

### **Biological Opinion Remand**

The Biological Opinion – released in May 2008 and further refined last year after a comprehensive review and endorsement by the current Administration – is geared toward achieving long-term stability and certainty in the effort to recover listed Columbia River salmon.

The Biological Opinion differs from previous ones in the following ways:

- It is a product of the region: developed by the Northwest states, Northwest tribes and the four regional federal agencies with responsibility for Columbia River salmon, as opposed to only the federal agencies as with past Biological Opinions.

- It includes even more rigorous scientific analysis than prior Biological Opinions. It takes real and current scientific information gathered at the watershed level and applies it to the problems facing fish as they move to and from the Pacific Ocean. This has resulted in an exponential increase in our knowledge of what these fish encounter throughout their life cycles, and provides a scientific roadmap to address the critical bottlenecks in their recovery. This scientific analysis was reviewed and endorsed by the current Administration.
- The new Biological Opinion includes major new funding commitments over 10 years, beyond those proposed in prior Biological Opinions (2000 and 2004).
- The new Biological Opinion meets the requirements of the Act to avoid jeopardy, and meets the previously expressed desires of the U.S. District Court Judge to demonstrate that the actions are “reasonably certain to occur”.

**It is time to get out of the courtroom and continue to move forward working together on the broad regional approach to salmon recovery.**

### **Dam Breaching**

- Thorough evidence within the science and economics does not support breaching the Lower Snake River dams. Nevertheless, the new implementation plan for the Biological Opinion would study this drastic action as a last resort.
- A prior comprehensive study on this issue—the Corps of Engineers’ 2002 study—concludes that dam breaching would provide uncertain benefits and would only target 4 of the 13 ESA-listed Columbia River stocks.
- At the same time, the study concludes that dam breaching would adversely affect the economy and environment, with over 3,000 MW of peaking capacity lost and increased emissions from replacement energy sources for the clean and renewable hydropower that would be lost.
- Emissions-- An independent analysis by the Northwest Power and Conservation Council shows that 4.4 million tons of CO<sub>2</sub> would be added to the atmosphere each year if the four dams were removed. Also, removal would require goods to be trucked vs. barged which would significantly increase costs and add to CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.
- Increased survival of many salmon runs, coupled with greater concern about global warming, underscores our point. There are far greater priorities and areas of focus in the fish and wildlife area than breaching. Predation management, comprehensive hatchery management, and harvest impacts are just some of those priorities.