



Mitchell Act Hatchery Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Gets Underway

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NOAA Fisheries will prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the funding and operation of Columbia River hatcheries supported through the Mitchell Act. Comments and suggestions are invited from all interested parties to ensure the EIS considers a full range of related issues and alternatives.

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Notice of Intent to Prepare an EIS**
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[The Mitchell Act \(Public Law 75-502\)](#) was passed in 1938 when Congress recognized that the salmon fishery of the Columbia River was in serious and progressive decline. The Mitchell Act is a Federal program that provides authority for funding, operation, and maintenance of hatcheries in the Columbia River basin. NOAA Fisheries administers funds appropriated for the Mitchell Act program by Congress and provides annual funding to the fishery management agencies of Oregon and Washington, the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for hatchery production of salmon and steelhead. Currently, these funds support the operation and maintenance of 18 hatcheries, which stock the mainstem Columbia River and its tributaries with close to 65 million salmon and steelhead annually. These funds also provide for the marking of hatchery fish and support associated monitoring, reform, and scientific investigations.

The Mitchell Act Hatchery EIS will evaluate the environmental impacts of a full range of alternatives for funding and operation of Columbia River hatchery programs consistent with the Mitchell Act, Endangered Species Act, treaty rights and tribal trust responsibilities, and broader NOAA Fisheries objectives for sustainable fisheries under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. For more information on topics that will be evaluated in the EIS, please click on the "[Key Topics...](#)" button to the left.

Comments must be received by NOAA Fisheries no later than December 2, 2004. Send correspondences to Allyson Ouzts, 525 NE Oregon St., Suite 510, Portland, OR 97232. Comments can also be sent via fax to (503) 872-2737, or via e-mail to MitchellActEIS.nwr@noaa.gov.

NOAA Fisheries asks that comments be as specific as possible. For more information on providing comments, including a list of topics of particular interest to NOAA Fisheries, please click on the "[Providing Comments](#)" button to the left.



Key Topics to be Evaluated in the Mitchell Act Hatchery EIS



The EIS will potentially address the following issues:

Salmonids

Steelhead and chinook, chum, and coho salmon are found within the project area. How will hatchery operations positively or negatively affect the distribution, diversity, and abundance of the various populations? Are there any hatchery barriers that prevent adult salmon and steelhead from migrating upstream? Are hatchery fish preserving the existence of any salmonid populations? Are the hatchery fish preying upon wild fish and/or competing for their food or space? Are hatchery fish interbreeding with wild fish and making wild fish less able to survive and reproduce? What are the effects of hatchery broodstock collection on wild populations? Are hatchery fish transferring disease to wild salmonids?

Other Fish and Wildlife

Many other fish and wildlife species are found in the project area, including bald eagles, otters, gulls, and bull trout. How will hatchery operations impact these other fish and wildlife species? Will there be an increase or decrease in the availability of food for these species? Are any predator control practices applied at the hatcheries that may impact wildlife?

Water Quality and Quantity

Hatcheries withdraw and release water used for fish rearing into streams and rivers. What are the impacts of this effluent on water quality?

Socio-Economics, Treaty Rights, and Tribal Trust Responsibilities

Treaty Indian tribes largely depend on hatchery fish for the meaningful exercise of treaty-guaranteed fishing rights. These fishing rights entitle the tribes to commercial, ceremonial, and subsistence fisheries. How are treaty fishing rights and tribal trust responsibilities affected by hatchery production? What is the cultural value of hatchery fish to Columbia River tribes? How do hatchery fish affect the socioeconomics of other communities?

Environmental Justice

Will hatchery operations under any EIS alternative have disproportional impacts on lower income groups?

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The Mitchell Act supports 18 hatcheries in the Columbia River basin that release close to 65 million fish annually.

The following table provides information on the number and species of fish released from each facility.

- For more information on ODFW's Mitchell Act hatchery programs, please see [this program summary](#).
- For more information on USFWS programs, please see the USFWS Hatchery Genetic and Management Plans, available on the [Northwest Region's HGMP page](#).
- For more information on WDFW hatchery programs, please visit their website at wdfw.wa.gov/hat/hgmp/ (this link takes you off of this NOAA Fisheries site).

Mitchell Act Production (by species/race), in numbers of fish released annually, for programs operated by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW), U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS), and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW).

Agency	Facility	Fall Chinook	Spring Chinook	Coho	Winter Steelhead	Summer Steelhead
ODFW	Big Creek	5,700,000		535,000	200,000	
	Bonneville/Cascade/Oxbow			4,800,000		
	Sandy			1,000,000		
	Bonneville				276,000	215,000
	Clackamas		1,577,000		15,000	
USFWS	Carson		1,420,000			
	Little White Salmon/Willard ¹		1,000,000	2,000,000		
	Eagle Creek			2,050,000	150,000	
	Spring Creek	15,300,000				
WDFW	Kalama Falls	5,000,000	500,000	800,000	180,000	
	North Toutle	2,500,000	100,000	800,000	25,000	
	Washougal	4,000,000		3,300,000		
	Elochoman	2,000,000		1,000,000	160,000	
	Ringold ²					225,000
	Klickitat	4,000,000	800,000	1,000,000		
	Skamania				190,000	330,000
Species Total		38,500,000	5,397,000	17,285,000	1,196,000	770,000

Grand Total: 63,148,000

¹ A portion of the Mitchell Act-funded coho and the non-Mitchell-Act-funded upriver bright fall chinook are acclimated in the Yakima Basin by the Yakama Nation with Mitchell Act funds.

² In addition, Ringold provides short-term acclimation for over 3,200,000 up-river bright fall chinook reared with U.S. Army Corps of Engineers funding at Bonneville Hatchery.



Fishery Harvest and the Mitchell Act Hatchery EIS

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The Mitchell Act was passed in 1938 when Congress recognized that the salmon fishery in the Columbia River was in serious and progressive decline. Years later, Congress passed the Magnuson-Stevens Fisheries and Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act) to establish additional measures to protect the nation's fisheries. In addition, the Federal government must protect tribal fishing rights guaranteed to the Columbia River Indian tribes in treaties with the U.S. government and reaffirmed in subsequent court decisions (e.g., U.S. v. Oregon), as well as fulfill the Federal tribal trust responsibilities to all tribal entities. NOAA Fisheries will follow these laws and mandates when developing the Mitchell Act EIS.

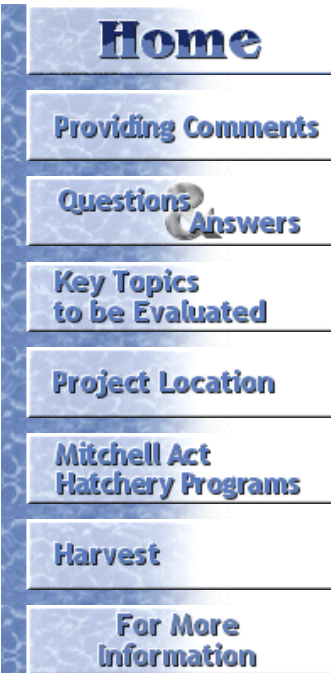
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Mitchell Act Hatcheries & Salmon Recovery



There are 12 Evolutionarily Significant Units (ESUs; see the brief explanation [below](#)) of salmon and steelhead in the Columbia River basin protected under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The ESA's purpose is to provide a program that brings endangered or threatened species to the point that continued protection under the ESA is no longer necessary. It is NOAA Fisheries' policy to work collaboratively with local interests on such programs or recovery plans.

Local groups throughout the Columbia River Basin are drafting subbasin plans for their areas through the Northwest Power and Conservation Council's Fish and Wildlife Program. NOAA Fisheries is working with regional groups, such as the Lower Columbia and Upper Columbia Fish Recovery Boards to "roll up" these local subbasin plans and take them to the next level of contributing to comprehensive ESA recovery plans for the ESUs.

The recovery plans will address the integration of habitat, harvest, hydro-power, and hatcheries with natural processes (e.g., cyclic ocean conditions). The final Columbia River basin hatchery plans, evaluated through NOAA Fisheries' ESA and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review processes, will be incorporated into the final Columbia River Basin recovery plans.

An ESU (Evolutionarily Significant Unit) is how NOAA Fisheries applies the concept of a "distinct population segment" to Pacific salmon and steelhead. An ESU is a distinct population or group of populations. A population or group of populations is considered distinct if they are "substantially reproductively isolated from conspecific populations" and if they are considered "an important component of the evolutionary legacy of the species."

For more information on ESUs, see: Waples, R.S. 1991. Definition of "Species" Under the Endangered Species Act: Application to Pacific Salmon. U.S. Department of Commerce, NOAA Technical Memorandum, NMFS, F/NWC-194.



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Question: Why should people be interested in this process?

Answer: This is an opportunity for the public to provide input on how NOAA Fisheries will allocate Mitchell Act funds specifically earmarked to support hatchery operations.

Question: How does this NEPA process relate to the NOAA Fisheries' proposed Hatchery Listing Policy?

Answer: The EIS process must identify and consider the effects of hatchery-origin fish over a broad range of topics (e.g., non-listed plant and animal species, water resources, and socio-economics in addition to listed species) and will closely track development of a final NOAA Fisheries Hatchery Listing Policy.

Question: Will the EIS affect the Endangered Species Act (ESA) status reviews for Columbia River basin salmon and steelhead?

Answer: The public comment period on NOAA Fisheries' proposed findings for Columbia River basin salmon and steelhead closes October 20, 2004, and final determinations are required by June 2005. Completion of the EIS during the fall of 2006 will come long after the ESA determinations for Columbia River basin salmon and steelhead. The ESA requires that listing decisions consider the best available commercial and scientific data. As the NEPA process proceeds, emerging information will be taken into account in ESA listing decisions up until the time that final decisions are published.

Question: How will hatchery programs supported through the Mitchell Act be evaluated under the Endangered Species Act (ESA)?

Answer: Hatchery programs that may affect ESA protected fish must be evaluated for compliance with the ESA. These programs include those that use ESA-protected fish for research or enhancement purposes. NOAA Fisheries will use information from this EIS when evaluating Mitchell Act-funded hatchery programs under the ESA.

Question: When does NOAA Fisheries expect to complete the EIS?

Answer: NOAA Fisheries expects to complete a draft EIS by fall 2005 and final EIS by fall 2006.

