

## HABITAT COMMITTEE REPORT

### **Klamath Letter**

The Habitat Committee (HC) has submitted a draft letter regarding supplemental Klamath flows for 2013, which is in the briefing book (Agenda Item F.1.b., Attachment 1). We encourage the Council to adopt this letter for transmittal to the Department of Interior.

In the second paragraph of the “Analysis” section, 48,000 AF should be replaced with 39,000 AF.

For your information, in 2013 water supplies have been forecasted to be much drier than observed in 2012. Forecasted inflows in the Trinity River have resulted in a “dry” water year classification for 2013. Meanwhile, hydrology for the upper Klamath River suffers for a significant lack of snow pack and present forecasts are for a much lower than average hydrology. Given these hydrologic conditions in the Klamath-Trinity Basin and the projected high run size of fall Chinook, supplemental flows will again be necessary. As noted in the letter, the HC strongly recommends a long-term solution to this reoccurring habitat concern.

### **Removal of Klamath Dams**

On Thursday April 4, the Department of the Interior released its final environmental impact statement (EIS) evaluating the removal of the four mainstem Klamath dams. The EIS is available at <http://www.klamathrestoration.gov/>. It identifies the preferred alternative as full removal of all four facilities; the matter now awaits congressional action before the Secretary of the Interior may make a determination of whether the removal of the four facilities is in the public interest.

### **Dam Tour**

On Thursday, April 4, the HC and other Council family members toured the sites of the former Condit and Marmot dams and viewed the fish passage facilities at Bonneville Dam. The visit and short tour to Bonneville Dam focused on fish passage and monitoring, as well as the newly added lamprey passage structures. At the two dam removal sites, the group was impressed by

- How quickly the Sandy River and White Salmon river were restoring themselves after five years and one year, respectively, post dam removal.
- How quickly fish came back to use the newly opened habitat areas. For example, in one year after Condit Dam removal, adults from two stocks of fall Chinook were seen to be spawning upstream and downstream of the former dam site. Adult steelhead and one bull trout have also been documented upstream of the former dam site.
- How quickly the sediment moved through the systems and how quickly the original channel of the river found itself. The sediment released by the dam removal has significantly changed the lower White Salmon River from a deep backwater for the Bonneville Dam pool to a shallow river similar to other river mouths in the Columbia River Gorge. A historical access site for Treaty fishermen near the river mouth has been affected, and efforts are underway to make it usable again under these new conditions.

## **Columbia River Treaty**

The HC would like to advise the Council on the renegotiation of the Columbia River water treaty with Canada. This is a timely issue that will have long-term effects on hydrosystem flow management, habitat availability and resilience, and ecosystem function in the Columbia River Basin. This is an important time for Columbia Basin interests to find common ground on flow management issues that address multiple uses including recovering and sustaining fishery resources. State, Federal and Tribal entities are in the process of developing flow management models for consideration in the Columbia River Treaty renegotiation process.

By mid-December the U.S. entities in the Sovereign Participation Process (U.S. entity/Federal government, tribes, states) will make a recommendation to the U.S. State Department on whether to renew, abandon or modernize the Treaty.

The HC will attempt to arrange a briefing on this topic and may offer to draft a letter for Council consideration for the September briefing book. We will continue to track this issue.

## **Northwest Power and Conservation Council Fish and Wildlife Program**

The Northwest Power and Conservation Council Fish and Wildlife Program is currently undergoing a review and amendment process. The HC recommends the Council send a letter after the June meeting to the NWPPC suggesting two ways to amend the program: coordinating with the PFMC on ocean research and ecosystem matters; and exploring adaptive use of higher spill levels to improve juvenile salmon survival. The HC also suggests the Council ask for an extension to the comment period on the Fish and Wildlife Program amendments to correspond with the PFMC process.

A growing body of data summarized in the annual Comparative Survival Study (CSS) (<http://tinyurl.com/dxcv2sy>) shows improvements in smolt-to-adult ratios resulting from Court-ordered mainstem spill on the Columbia River, which is above the spill level identified in the current NMFS Biological Opinion. At a past HC meeting, a presentation on the CSS suggested that modest increases in spill could double adult returns back to Idaho. This indicates that mainstem dam operations incorporating enhanced spill above the levels in the Biological Opinion result in enhanced juvenile survival, and that the optimal strategy for enhanced juvenile survival through spill is not yet fully understood.

The HC proposes that the Council recommend that expanded spill operations be implemented at mainstem Columbia River dams at and above the level of recent Court-ordered spills as a deliberate adaptive management strategy. At a minimum, the new Fish and Wildlife Program should support management actions to test the effects of higher levels of spill and implement future spill programs under an adaptive management approach based on ongoing and future spill level research.

Additionally the HC believes the CSS should be expanded to include other stocks such as Snake River Fall Chinook and other Upriver bright fall Chinook stocks to better define effective future use of mainstem spill.

If directed by the Council, the HC will develop a letter to the Northwest Power and Conservation Council for Council consideration at its June meeting that expands on these and other general issues.

PFMC

04/07/13