

## HABITAT STEERING GROUP PROPOSED ACTION FORM

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**HSG Sponsor:** Ms. Liz Hamilton

**Title of Issue:** Columbia River Flows for 2005

**Deadline (if any):** Fast Track

**Proposed Action:** Letter to federal managers regarding needs for fish under drought conditions.

**Addressed To:** Army Corp of Engineer, Bureau of Reclamation, National Marine Fisheries Service, Bonneville Power Administration

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**Description of Issue:** In 2005, drought conditions will once again adversely affect outmigration conditions for juvenile salmon. This will likely affect future ocean fisheries. The Council should provide comments to the federal hydrosystem operators to encourage them to provide sufficient water and spill to ensure adequate juvenile survival.

**Description of Regional Significance:** The health of Columbia River fall chinook, and in particular Snake River wild fall chinook, have a major influence on regional salmon harvest opportunities.

**Potential Adverse Impacts to EFH?**                       Yes                       No

**For Which Species?** Chinook and coho salmon.

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**Potential Benefits of Proposed Action:** Improve coho and chinook essential fish habitat to levels that will sustain robust tribal, commercial and recreational salmon fisheries over time.

*Attach draft document for Habitat Committee consideration.*



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Dear Sirs:

The Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) is concerned about Columbia Basin water conditions in 2005 and the impacts to fish, fishing communities, and businesses that will likely ensue, unless steps are taken now to improve conditions. This year (2005) may be among the worst water years on record in the Pacific Northwest. This drought will have devastating effects on this year's salmon and steelhead outmigration. As we learned in 2001, dangerously low flows will result in significantly slower migration times, leaving juvenile salmon and steelhead more susceptible to predators and the ill effects of lethally hot water temperatures. We call on you to protect these fish and recognize the value of the fisheries they support.

The impact of low water conditions on the Northwest's fisheries is significant. Columbia Basin impacts in 2001 were aggravated by a federal agency decision to cease providing spill for migrating salmon in order to generate revenue from additional electricity generation.

While the Council is keenly aware of the management challenges presented by drought conditions for federal dam operators, we urge you to remember that the impacts of a drought on Pacific coast salmon and steelhead, and the fisheries that depend upon them, are felt over several years. Our fisheries are still suffering the effects of poor water conditions several years ago. It is imperative that water management meets the needs of migrating fish so that the socio-economic costs of this drought do not rest unfairly on those dependent on fisheries.

We urge you to take immediate actions to ensure that salmon and steelhead migrate through the Federal Columbia River Power System ("FCRPS") quickly, minimizing exposure to harmful river conditions, and to improve river conditions through water acquisitions and full implementation of the FCRPS Biological Opinion's spill provisions. Such actions will protect the significant regional investments in salmon recovery and the fishery jobs that go along with that investment. Without them, Pacific salmon, and the fisheries that rely upon them, will be feeling the effects of this drought long after others have forgotten it.

Sincerely,

Donald McIssac  
Executive Director