

KLAMATH DAM REMOVAL RELATED ADJUSTMENTS TO MANAGEMENT TARGETS

As the Klamath Dam Removal project nears the reservoir draw down and dam removal phase the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) notes the need to begin planning for active management of Klamath River fall Chinook (KRFC) in terms that may go beyond those prescribed in the Pacific Coast Salmon Fishery Management Plan (FMP) and the associated KRFC Harvest Control Rule (HCR). The current expectation for volitional passage of anadromous salmonids is during the fall of 2024. Post dam removal, over 400 miles of new habitat will be available to anadromous salmonids, roughly doubling what is currently available with dams in place. Further, the states of Oregon and California are currently developing regulations to protect anadromous salmonids as they escape to and utilize this new habitat, such that repopulation and recovery is effectively and expeditiously achieved.

At present time the escapement objective or S_{MSY} for KRFC of 40,700 natural-area adults is based upon a stock-recruitment analysis that is in part a function of habitat availability via the total number of successful spawners. With the expansion of habitat anticipated after dam removal, a new stock-recruitment analysis will be needed. While there are other factors to consider, increasing the amount of habitat will necessitate a new analysis in the years to come. It is expected that at least 8 to 10 years of data will be necessary before a new, long-term, escapement objective can be derived. However, there is arguably an immediate need to begin considering new management objectives that are in excess of FMP HCR prescribed targets in an effort to promote and enhance the repopulation and recovery of Chinook utilizing the new habitat. Coupled with the potential loss of productivity due to dam removal activities themselves in the near term, via sedimentation of gravel downstream, a more conservative approach to managing fisheries may be warranted. While annual fluctuations in stock abundance and limiting factors related to weak stock management in ocean fisheries will clearly play a role in determining annual escapement projections, explicit treatment of a KRFC escapement objective and HCR parameters is warranted.

CDFW recommends that the Council consider formation of an ad-hoc workgroup to inform the science and policy needs surrounding active management of KRFC populations after dams are removed. This workgroup may need to meet several times over the course of 2023 and early 2024, with the goal of providing management recommendations by March 2024 for implementation in fishery planning each year. The potential exists that those management actions may be a function of an adaptive management framework that can be implemented annually, or there may be a need to convene the workgroup in the winter/spring each year until S_{MSY} can be established. Alternative pathways and/or timelines that bring the necessary science and policy, Council representatives from the state and federal resource agencies, industry, and tribes, and Council support should be considered given the significant workload the Council and its representatives are faced with at this time. However, the timeline attached to this dam removal project is inflexible and a successful restoration project is of great importance to many. This includes Council planning to effectively repopulate the new habitat. Terms of Reference and a clear timeline for this workgroup need to be developed with the help of Council staff and pertinent management partners.