



**Statement of Salmon For All
Concerning the Mitchell Act DEIS
Astoria, Oregon
September 30, 2010**

Good evening. My name is Hobe Kytr. I am the nonprofit administrator for Salmon For All, a nonprofit trade association of Columbia River commercial fishermen and processors, representing the lower river non-Indian gillnet fleet.

The Mitchell Act originally was enacted by congress in May of 1938 in response to the very real threat to the Columbia River's once mighty salmon runs posed by the construction of Bonneville Dam, the impending Columbia Basin Project, and the projected continuing development of the Columbia River Basin over the next several decades, including but not limited to large federal hydroelectric dam projects. By 1938, a large percentage of the once extensive habitat available to Columbia River salmonids had been lost behind dams built without fish passage. Work was continuing on Grand Coulee Dam, scheduled for completion in 1941, which would cut off the upper third of the Columbia River Basin from fish passage forever. Beginning in 1939, the Grand Coulee Fish Maintenance Program began efforts to salvage what could be saved of the salmon runs of the upper Columbia River by trapping fish at Rock Island Dam and hauling them in tanker trucks to what little habitat was still available in the Okanogan, Entiat, Methow, and Wenatchee Rivers. Fish culturists from the US Fish & Wildlife Service also sought to transform the upper river runs into composite, blended stocks suitable for artificial propagation. This is the context of desperate need in which the Mitchell Act legislation emerged.

In the best of all possible worlds, one would have hoped that more care should have been taken to preserve salmonid spawning habitat in the Columbia River Basin. But that's not what happened. Hydropower development, federal and otherwise, has turned the Columbia River into the most dammed river in the world. Irrigation projects transformed the Columbia Plateau into one of the most productive agricultural regions in the world, but also lured countless millions of migrating salmonids into unscreened irrigation ditches that proved to be dead-end death traps. Logging, pollution, industrial and ever encroaching urban development all took their toll west of the Cascades as well. In desperate attempts to save lower Columbia River Chinook and coho salmon, Mitchell Act hatcheries became the repositories in which their genetic legacy still resides.

Much has been said and written about what recovery of the Columbia River's populations of salmon and steelhead would look like, and what it would take to achieve that goal, insofar as it is possible. Those of us who represent various constituencies of the harvest community are perhaps the strongest proponents of Columbia River salmonid recovery. We have the most at stake in this effort, the most to gain if it succeeds, and the most to lose if it does not. But, none of the five options presented in the Mitchell Act Draft Environmental Impact Statement will help us advance towards recovery.

In fact, all the options presented in the Mitchell Act DEIS lead us away from Columbia River salmonid recovery. By defining the status quo as the conditions present in 2007, Option One undoes all the advances in hatchery reform during the past three years, including successful supplementation programs instituted by the Columbia River Treaty Tribes as co-managers of the fishery. All the options presented fail to live up to federal treaty trust obligations under the 2008-2017 *US v. Oregon* Management Agreement and the 2008 renewal of the Pacific Salmon Treaty. Not one of the Options is consistent with Washington's updated 2010 Lower Columbia Salmon Recovery and Fish and Wildlife Subbasin Plan, or with the Conservation and Recovery Plan for Oregon's Populations of Lower Columbia Salmon and Steelhead recently approved by the Oregon Fish & Wildlife Commission. It is dispiriting to find that, all the while NMFS has been directing the states, tribes, and regional councils to engage in recovery planning, that the agency itself has been working on a Draft Environmental Impact Statement for Mitchell Act hatcheries that negates all the effort that has gone into the recovery planning mandated by NMFS.

The errors and omissions in the Mitchell Act DEIS are too numerous to reference here in any detail, but they are seriously disturbing. The coho and Chinook modeling in Appendix K use the wrong parameters with reference to the 2008-2117 *US v. Oregon* Management Agreement, the wrong allocation formulae for the non-Indian commercial and recreational mark-selective fisheries for spring Chinook, and the wrong mortality rate for the tangle net fishery. Even if the data on smolt production in the Columbia basin used in Appendix K were correct, and there is good reason to suspect they are not, the conclusions derived from the calculations in the modeling exercise still would be so erroneous that they would be useless to anyone. Appendix I, the Socioeconomic Resource Report, was never peer-reviewed nor completed, meaning that not only does it not live up to accepted academic standards, it does not meet NOAA Fisheries' own policy on peer review and data quality. The data on environmental justice communities in Tables 3-26, 3-27, and 3-28 list the wrong census data, and omit data from the four poorest counties in the states of Washington and Oregon, where the majority of our fishermen just happen to reside. These are only a few of the glaring deficiencies noted in the DEIS.

At this point in time, it is quite clear that the Mitchell Act Draft Environmental Impact Statement was not ready for public review. We call for the National Marine Fisheries Service to withdraw the DEIS until it actually has engaged in the full consultation process that already should have taken place with the tribes, states, and agencies that co-manage Columbia River fisheries. The data and conclusions in the Mitchell Act DEIS are of no use to those constituencies who are most likely to be affected by the draconian cuts proposed for Columbia River salmonid production levels. We reject the listed range of options that call for far fewer fish for the Columbia River Basin, which threaten to leave us all with reduced and failing fisheries. Let us instead embrace hope, and work together for increased abundance, leading to genuine recovery for Columbia River salmonids wherever it is possible to achieve that worthy goal. Finally, we remind the National Marine Fisheries Service that the mitigation obligations undertaken by the federal government in 1938, which were renewed and expanded in 1946, have not ended. The dams are still there, lost habitat is still lost, degraded habitat has only begun to be rehabilitated, and the naturally spawning salmonid stocks upon which recovery depends are not yet recovered, nor will any of the options presented in the DEIS make them more likely to do so.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. Salmon For All will provide detailed written comments on the Mitchell Act DEIS before the deadline for submitting public comment.

The DAILY ASTORIAN



Thursday, September 30, 2010

Be there

National Marine Fisheries assumes Columbia fish hatcheries will be cut

Thursday, September 30, 2010

What happens if Columbia River salmon hatchery operations are cut? In the absence of unplanned and unattainable habitat restoration, salmon runs will begin dwindling. Generations-long agreements will be trashed. Many people who have built lives around fishing will be out of jobs. Salmon will have lost their most passionate and knowledgeable advocates.

Why is this even a question? A federal hearing in Astoria from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. today at the Columbia River Maritime Museum looks at future alternatives that all assume cutbacks in hatcheries. This is a matter of deep concern. Anyone who cares about salmon and our economy should attend.

News this year has included remarkable success stories about a number of upriver runs that were once given little chance of surviving into the 21st century. There have been hundreds of thousands of chinook in the Snake River. coho are back to viability in the Yakima River. Hanford Reach fall chinook returns are inspirational.

Hatcheries are vital to all these runs and many others, either by directly producing the fish or by surrounding naturally spawning salmon with a large protective cushion of fish specifically meant to be caught. This system is far from perfect. Salmon advocates will always wish that dams on Snake and upper reaches of the Columbia either had not been built or had at least included far better provisions for salmon passage.

In fact, the conversion of the Columbia into a hydropower system starting in the 1930s was known almost from the very start to threaten salmon. You cannot throw up a series of huge concrete barriers and expect salmon runs to prosper. It was obvious that fishing industry, towns like Astoria, and the Columbia Basin's many vibrant salmon-based tribal cultures were being sacrificed in order to provide electricity for cities and irrigation water for farms.

To mitigate for this fact, the Mitchell Act set up a series of federal hatcheries. Despite decades of stagnant funding, they continue to bring millions of young salmon to life. This results in hundreds of thousands of returning adults. This doesn't compare to the millions that came back predams, but it is something.

Now, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) is starting an environmental impact statement (EIS) process. Initially directed only at examining federal hatchery processes and funding, it was quietly expanded to include all hatcheries on the river system. This blindsided fishing communities, tribes and industries.

Problems with the draft EIS are rife. They start with the biased assumption that hatcheries should be cut back in some way. Hatcheries, especially those operated by the upriver treaty tribes, are vastly improved over what they were only 10 or 20 years ago. They produce healthy, viable fish. Can hatcheries be operated even more smartly? Very possibly so. But cutting federal hatcheries and interfering in the operations of others is no way to go.

Beyond this, the draft EIS is inconsistent with hard-won Oregon and Washington salmon recovery plans, with Canadian and tribal treaty obligations and with the fisheries allocation process south of Cape Falcon. All these fundamental problems mean the draft EIS must be withdrawn. NMFS should start over from scratch, without bias, and include everybody. Hatchery operations must continue in the meantime.

In important ways, fishing interests have come a long way in recent years. Commercial, tribal, charter, sport and conservation groups see eye to eye in some key ways. Foremost among these is knowledge that strong salmon runs are good for everyone, and fights are bad for everyone. Hatcheries are an indispensable tool. They must be supported and defended.