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Contact:
Nola Conway

Phone: (509) 527-7020

Corps completes lower Snake River study on improving fish passage

Portland, Ore. - The U. S. Army Corps of Engineers has chosen major system improvements, now called "adaptive migration," as the selected alternative in its study of improving salmon passage through the four lower Snake River dams. Brig. Gen. David A. Fastabend, the Corps' Northwestern Division commander, signed the Record of Decision on Sept. 9.

The record of decision documents the Corps' selected action as a result of the Lower Snake River Juvenile Salmon Migration Feasibility Study process.

Approximately 9,000 people attended meetings held on the study and more than 230,000 written comments were received on the Corps' draft document.

"A key factor in selecting the alternative includes compatibility with the National Marine Fisheries Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 2000 Biological Opinions on the operation of the Federal Columbia River Power System," said Lonnie Mettler, Walla Walla District project manager for the feasibility study.

The selected alternative also provides the maximum flexibility of the alternatives considered in optimizing both in-river migration and transport conditions to improve the juvenile and adult salmon and steelhead survival rates through the lower Snake River projects. The selected alternative also provides less uncertainty in current biological information, minimizes economic impacts to users and minimizes effects to other environmental resources.

Operational changes proposed include improving the coordination and implementation of spill, flow augmentation and juvenile fish transportation.

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Public Affairs Office, Walla Walla District Headquarters, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, 201 N. Third Ave, Walla Walla, WA 99362-1876
Phone (509) 527-7020 FAX (509) 527-7824 CELL (509) 520-1468
Web site: www.nww.usace.army.mil E-mail: cenww-pa@usace.army.mil

CORPS COMPLETES STUDY/2-2-2

Structural changes include both near- and long-term improvements. The near-term actions include spillway improvements, upgrading adult fish passage systems, upgrading juvenile fish facilities and additional fish transportation barges. Proposed long-term improvements include turbine upgrades, removable spillway weirs and surface bypass structures.

The purpose of the feasibility study, which began in 1995, was to examine ways of improving salmon passage through the four lower Snake River dams and reservoirs – Ice Harbor, Lower Monumental, Little Goose, and Lower Granite. The dams and locks cost \$36.5 million dollars to maintain annually. This cost includes the maintenance of fish facilities and the fish transportation program. The annual value of power, transportation and water supply provided by the lower Snake River dams is \$324 million. The estimated cost of implementing the proposed structural improvements and changes in operations is \$390 million dollars over a period of 10 years.

Four alternatives were identified and thoroughly explored within the study -- existing condition; maximum transport of juvenile salmon; major systems improvements (adaptive migration); and dam breaching.

The Bonneville Power Administration, Bureau of Reclamation, and Environmental Protection Agency were cooperating agencies in developing the feasibility report and environmental impact study. Other federal agencies, including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries Service, provided essential input.

“The region is to be commended for their participation in this process. The Corps is committed to assisting in the restoration of salmon and steelhead,” said Fastabend.

For more information on the Corps' Lower Snake River Juvenile Salmon Migration Feasibility Study visit <http://www.nww.usace.army.mil/lsr>.