

A quick look at the Federal Columbia River Power System operations



The Federal Columbia River Power System is a unique collaboration among three U.S. government agencies—the Bonneville Power Administration, the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers and the Bureau of Reclamation.

The 31 federal dams in the Federal Columbia River Power System (FCRPS) have fueled the region's economic growth for more than 70 years, providing nearly 40 percent of the region's electric power supply as well as flood control, irrigation, navigation and recreation.

The FCRPS is operated by Bonneville Power Administration, Army Corps of Engineers and Bureau of Reclamation. To provide guidance for managing the affect of the FCRPS on endangered species NOAA Fisheries issues a Biological Opinion (BiOps). Under these BiOps, the federal agencies carry out a wide range of actions to help listed fish at all stages of their lifecycle.

While there is much focus on the hydropower system, hydropower operations alone will not recover salmon. Many other factors have contributed to the salmon's decline, including overharvest, hatchery practices, degraded habitat and ocean conditions.

BiOps have been updated through the years, but lawsuits continue to filed that contend the plans are insufficient to mitigate the impact of the hydrosystem to salmon and steelhead. Some contend that best and only option is to remove four Snake River dams. The 2014 BiOp was backed by four federal agencies, three Northwest states and nearly all the regional tribes but challenged by Oregon, Nez Perce Tribe, National Wildlife Federation and others.

In 2016, Judge Simon, U.S. District Court for the District of Oregon, rejected the most recent BiOp and ruled all options needed to be reviewed including the removal of Snake River dams. The judge failed to acknowledge the historic collaboration amongst the Northwest states, tribes and utilities; questioned the \$1 billion investment in habitat restoration with states and tribes; and rejected the Obama Administration's unprecedented review and support for the BiOp's science analysis. The Court also ordered additional "spill-test" for 2018 which sends water through the dams for fish migration rather than using the water at the dams to generate power. Judge Simon's rejection marked the fifth time a judge in Oregon District court has ruled against a BiOp, sending this one back to the federal agencies for yet another redo in the plan.

Since 1978, over \$15 billion has been spent on fish mitigation projects which are paid for by utility customers through their electric bills. Fish runs have improved tremendously through the years, in large part thanks to the investments made at the dams including the addition of spillway weirs, fish ladders and other upgrades.

To fully restore salmon runs, a comprehensive approach that looks beyond the hydrosytem and address all issues hatchery production, improves habitat, consider ocean conditions, minimizes harvest and stop running the river system through the courtroom.

Sources:

*The Northwest Power and Conservation Council nwcouncil.org
Northwest RiverPartners - NWRiverPartners.org
Public Power Council - PPCPDX.org
The Columbia River Basin Federal Caucus – www.salmonrecovery.org
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) – www.noaa.gov*



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