Restoration and Protection of Aquatic Habitat on Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service Lands

Salmon and trout species found on Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service-administered lands in the Columbia River Basin (this includes parts of eastern Oregon and Washington, Idaho, and western Montana) include: bull trout, westlope cutthrout trout, Yellowstone cutthroat trout, Lahontan cutthroat trout, redband trout, steelhead trout, and chinook and sockeye salmon. Five of these species (bull trout, Lahontan cutthroat trout, steelhead trout, chinook salmon, and sockeye salmon) are on the Endangered Species Act list in all or portions of their distribution.

The Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management manage over 60 percent of the currently accessible spawning and rearing habitat for anadromous fish in the Basin. The Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management habitat is found mostly in the upper and mid-elevation portions of watersheds. The remaining habitat is a combination of private, state, Tribal, and other federal lands.

Salmon Habitat Conditions

The quality and quantity of aquatic habitat on federal and non-federal lands have declined from historic conditions. Habitat conditions on federal lands tend to be closest to historic conditions in areas where few management activities have taken place, such as wilderness and roadless areas. Many of these areas are capable of supporting salmon at near historic levels. In the Snake River drainage approximately 70 percent of the accessible salmon habitat on federal lands is within a roadless area or a Congressionally designated wilderness.

Federal lands with lower quality habitat conditions tend to be characterized by a past legacy of logging, livestock grazing, road construction and mining. These federal lands support salmon populations but at lower than historic levels.

Overall, the habitat conditions on Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service-administered lands are stable or in an upward trend and have the capacity necessary to sustain healthy salmon populations. However, the habitat capacity of Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service-administered lands is not being fully utilized due to other factors affecting salmon survival, such as habitat outside of Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management-administered lands, hatcheries, harvest, and hydropower. Salmon recovery will depend on addressing all of these factors, including management of Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management-administered lands.

Management of Salmon Habitat

The Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management presently manage anadromous and resident fish habitat within the Columbia River Basin under direction known as PACFISH and INFISH and their related Biological Opinions. These Biological Opinions were issued by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service. Federal aquatic habitat within the Columbia River drainage in western Oregon and Washington is guided by the Northwest Forest Plan.

PACFISH, INFISH and the Northwest Forest Plan:

- $ Establish watershed and riparian goals to maintain or restore all fish habitat;
- $ Establish aquatic and riparian habitat management objectives;
- $ Delineate riparian management areas;
- $ Provide specific standards and guidelines for management activities (timber harvesting, grazing, fire suppression, and mining) in riparian areas;
- $ Provide a system of key watersheds to protect and restore important fish habitats;

- $ Call for watershed analyses and subbasin reviews to set priorities and provide guidance on priorities for watershed restoration; and,
- $ Provide general guidance on implementation and effectiveness monitoring.

It is the objective of the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management to manage and maintain habitat and where feasible, restore habitats that are degraded. PACFISH, INFISH and the Northwest Forest Plan provide for the protection of areas that could contribute to the recovery of fish and, overall, improve riparian habitat and water quality throughout the basin. These objectives are accomplished through such activities as closing and rehabilitating roads, replacing culverts, changing grazing and logging practices, and re-planting native vegetation along streams and rivers.

The Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management also provide funds and technical expertise for restoration projects on private lands. Field offices work with local watershed councils and groups to plan and carry out priority restoration projects on both federal and non- federal lands.

The Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Marine Fisheries Service, and Environmental Protection Agency are also currently preparing a broadscale, ecosystem-based management strategy for Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management-administered lands in the basin. This strategy, known as the Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project (ICBEMP) addresses fish and wildlife habitat and aquatic and riparian health and other broadscale issues of forest and rangeland health and socio-economics. The aquatic component of this strategy will provide long-term guidance on the protection and restoration of fish habitat and, when finalized, will replace PACFISH and INFISH.

Aquatic Strategy in the Final EIS & Proposed Decision for ICBEMP
A primary objective of the proposed decision is to improve and maintain habitat conditions for fish and wildlife species. Following are some key aspects of the management direction that are designed to achieve these objectives:

- $ Approximately 15.1 million acres of Riparian Conservation Areas would be identified using local information. No new management activities would be allowed in these areas unless they meet riparian health objectives.

- $ 7.1 million acres of aquatic subwatersheds are identified and proposed for aquatic restoration.

- $ 6.5 million acres of aquatic subwatersheds are identified and proposed for aquatic protection.

- $ Watershed Condition Indicators are also included in the management direction to assess the effectiveness of management actions in achieving aquatic/riparian/hydrologic objectives.

- $ Analysis processes of Subbasin Review and Ecosystem Analysis at the Watershed Scale (EAWS) would also be implemented to promote the most appropriate placement and timing of management activities and to identify and avoid risks to endangered fish and wildlife species. Subbasin Reviews would be conducted for all subbasins within the first seven years of implementation and within 3 years for subbasins designated as restoration priorities. EAWS would occur prior to actions that might negatively impact endangered fish species, or certain important terrestrial species habitat.

The release of the Final EIS for ICBEMP initiates a public protest process that begins December 15, 2000 and ends January 16, 2000. Once the protests are reviewed and responded to, a Record of Decision for ICBEMP will be issued. At that time, National Forests and BLM Districts will begin implementating the

new strategy. The Record of Decision will amend 62 land use plans for the 32 National Forests and BLM Districts within the Columbia River Basin.

The Future of Salmon Habitat

Present management practices established through the Northwest Forest Plan, PACFISH, and INFISH as well as future management practices under the ICBEMP, will lead to improved habitat conditions on Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management-administered lands. These improved habitat conditions, in combination with changes to harvest, hatchery, and hydropower programs, are needed to sustain harvestable populations of salmon and contribute to the overall recovery of these important species.