



July 27, 2000

Contact: Brian Gorman, NMFS; 206-526-6613

Ed Mosey, BPA; 503-230-5359

**Federal Agencies Propose Comprehensive Salmon Recovery
Strategy for Pacific Northwest
Call on States, Tribes to Join in Restoration Effort**

A team of federal agencies today proposed a comprehensive long-term strategy for restoring threatened and endangered salmon and steelhead in the Columbia River Basin of the Pacific Northwest. The agencies released two draft documents outlining actions to be taken by the federal government and proposing additional steps by tribal, state and local governments, which together would prevent the extinction and foster the recovery of 12 salmon populations currently protected under the Endangered Species Act.

The first document is a draft “biological opinion” by the National Marine Fisheries Service, which will guide operations of the 29 federal dams on the Columbia and Snake rivers and their tributaries. The second is a draft Basin-Wide Salmon Recovery Strategy (formerly the All-H Paper) that incorporates the requirements of the biological opinion and includes additional measures to improve hatcheries, limit salmon harvest and restore salmon habitat. The agencies expect to make both documents final later this year, following a 60-day review by the states and tribes.

A central feature of the proposed strategy is the establishment of explicit, scientifically based performance standards to gauge the status of salmon stocks and the success of recovery efforts over the next five to ten years. Progress will be measured against those standards in five, eight and ten years to determine if more aggressive recovery efforts – including the breaching of four Lower Snake River dams – will be necessary.

“The federal government is fully committed to doing its part to restore the imperiled salmon of the Pacific Northwest. Today, we propose a long-term strategy grounded in the best available science. This strategy is practical and comprehensive and places the highest priority on those actions likely to produce the greatest benefit for the broadest range of species throughout the basin,” said George T. Frampton, Jr., acting chair of the White House Council on Environmental Quality.

“Bringing back the region’s salmon while strengthening its economy is an extraordinary challenge -- one the federal government cannot meet on its own. Achieving these goals will also require a genuine commitment by the people and the governments of the Pacific Northwest,” said Frampton. “We welcome the support and input of the region’s tribes and states and are committed to forging a strong and lasting partnership with them. And, if our common efforts do not achieve the progress we need, we all must be prepared to take even stronger action. Extinction is not an option.”

"This is a very ambitious plan," said William Stelle, regional administrator for the fisheries service in Seattle. "It takes a broad-based approach to rebuilding salmon stocks in the Columbia Basin and establishes strong mechanisms to insure that our recovery efforts can be adjusted to reflect the best and latest science."

The proposed federal strategy outlines actions addressing the four so-called Hs of salmon recovery: habitat, hatcheries, harvest and hydropower:

Habitat. Habitat efforts will cover three areas: tributary streams, the estuary and the mainstem rivers. In the tributaries, protection and restoration of federal lands will provide a strong base. For non-federal lands, federal agencies will work with non-federal partners on actions with immediate benefits: flows in streams, removal of barriers to fish movement, improving water quality and rebuilding the health of buffers along streams. The strategy calls on the states to increase their complementary efforts to improve water quality and stream flows. In the estuary, federal agencies will support rapid implementation of the Lower Columbia River Estuary Program, particularly restoration and acquisition of important habitat areas, and continue aggressive predator controls. In the mainstem of the Columbia and Snake rivers, federal agencies will work to restore shoreline habitats for migrating salmon and to continue protection for the Hanford Reach.

Hatcheries: The strategy proposes reforms of federally funded hatcheries to minimize harm to wild salmon and improve survival rates of hatchery stocks. In addition, hatcheries will use "supplementation" strategies to prevent extinction of weak stocks by collecting eggs and sperm from wild fish and releasing the resulting offspring into streams inhabited by wild populations.

Harvest: The federal agencies, working with the states and tribes, will cap harvest of protected species at current levels. There may be further reductions of harvest levels, where practical, through more selective fishing techniques, license buyouts or other approaches.

Hydropower: The federal agencies will maximize survival of juvenile and adult salmon throughout the hydropower system by improving water management and quality, increasing spill and taking other measures. The goal will be to improve the ability of the young and adult fish to pass safely through the dams and reservoirs that separate spawning and juvenile rearing areas from the ocean.

In addition, the agencies propose to undertake engineering and other studies for potential breaching of the four Lower Snake River dams. Ultimately, any decision to breach the dams will require authorization by Congress. However, completion of these studies will reduce the time needed to secure the necessary authorization in the event breaching is deemed essential to avoid extinction of Snake River stocks. The studies would include an evaluation of strategies to reduce impacts to communities, industries and Indian tribes and ensure that any breaching proposal is fair and affordable.

Federal actions proposed in the draft strategy will be undertaken by the Federal Caucus, the nine agencies with salmon responsibility in the Northwest. They are the Army Corps of Engineers, Bonneville Power Administration, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Reclamation, Environmental Protection Agency, Fish and Wildlife Service, Forest Service and National Marine Fisheries Service. The strategy proposes to use existing mechanisms wherever possible (for example, the Lower Columbia River Estuary Program or the Northwest Power Planning Council program) and to create additional mechanisms where needed.

The two draft documents are being shared today with state fish and wildlife agencies and Northwest tribes for technical review. The two documents and supporting information can be found on the web sites for the National Marine Fisheries Service at <http://www.nwr.noaa.gov> or for the federal caucus at <http://www.bpa.gov/federalcaucus>.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is today also releasing its draft Biological Opinion on resident fish in the Columbia Basin.

###