

## Agencies release Columbia fish recovery plan

Posted by [The Associated Press](#) September 06, 2007

Federal agencies have released a plan they say will improve recovery of Columbia Basin salmon and steelhead. But wildlife advocates immediately dismissed it as a failure and a continued breach of the Endangered Species Act.

"This plan leaves little doubt that the federal government is not really committed to finding a solution for our communities," said Dustin Aherin of the Idaho-based Citizens for Progress.

Bonneville Power Administration, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and Bureau of Reclamation submitted the plan to National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Fisheries at the end of August. The plan was made public Thursday.

NOAA will conduct its own analysis of the plan and assess its effect on the species.

Federal courts repeatedly have rejected plans submitted by the agencies.

The government said the latest one is the most comprehensive approach to date. Agency officials said it includes the most extensive analysis of the fish stocks in a larger area, represents a major collaboration with groups including tribes, and has more action items that cost more. The ten-year plan includes steps to address the habitat, hatcheries and predator control surrounding the fish.

"We've included a robust set of actions that we think will make a substantial contribution to the recovery of these fish," said Steve Wright, BPA administrator. "So we believe, given what the judge has told us ... we have responded to that."

But critics called it warmed-over.

"This is the same plan with a new ribbon on it," said Nicole Cordan of Save Our Wild Salmon Coalition.

Their primary criticism is that the plan ignores the impact of the hydropower systems on the Columbia River and Upper Snake River. Several groups say hydropower is the main cause of deteriorating fish runs in the Northwest.

Nola Layde, spokeswoman for the Corps of Engineers, said the organizations have already improved fish passage at the dams to the point where only minor improvements could be

made to improve the fish's survival. So the agencies instead focused their attention on changes that could be made elsewhere.

"The only thing they are committing to is something they are already doing and that isn't working," said Glen Spain of the Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations, which represents commercial fishing families.

Some critics said the latest plan includes a setback -- reducing the amount of water spilled over the dams to aid in downstream migration.

"The federal agencies can slice the numbers and spin the data any way they want," said James Schroeder, senior environmental policy specialist with the National Wildlife Federation. "But the bottom line is clear: Fewer and fewer fish are returning each year, and that decline has real economic consequences in the region and beyond."