



Questions & Answers
NOAA-FISHERIES DRAFT BIOLOGICAL OPINION
October 31, 2007

Q. Is there anything new in this plan?

A. Yes.

- This BiOp was developed in the region, by Northwest Sovereigns, states, Indian tribes and the federal agencies – not done only by the federal agencies as past BiOps, and not the product of the Administration;
- It includes a rigorous science analysis not seen in previous BiOps;
- It includes significant new funding commitments;
- The legal analysis is completely different than the 2004 BiOp:
--the legal deficiencies cited by Judge Redden are corrected and all listed species (except sockeye) are on track to recovery.

Q. Does this plan “roll-back” flow and spill from previous BiOps?

A. No. Previous BiOps did not include summer spill - that was added by the court. This draft BiOp, based on the science analysis, recommends reducing spill in July and August if there are: 1) because almost all fish have already passed the projects; and, 2) some fish do better with barging than spill (steelhead). The draft plan employs a variety of tools, flow, spill and transport that takes into account the scientific data and needs of individual listed stocks. The Independent Science Advisory Board has stated that the old notion that more flow/spill automatically translates into higher survivals is no longer a “valid paradigm”.

Q. How will this BiOp recover salmon?

A. While the analysis shows implementing the plan will assist in putting the listed stocks on a path to recovery over time, recovery is not the goal of any BiOp. Rather, recovery is a far more comprehensive process which involves NOAA developing long-term recovery plans. The BiOp will contribute to recovery but is not responsible for achieving recovery.

Also, some suggest that the goal of the BiOp should be: “sustainable, harvestable” levels of listed salmon and steelhead. This goes even beyond a recovery goal, and is not found anywhere in the Endangered Species Act.

Q. So, what is this plan then?

A. The BiOp is plan for how the federal hydrosystem will be operated, and investments that will be made in fish passage over the next ten years to avoid jeopardizing listed stocks. It also includes habitat and estuary funding, predation controls and other measures to ensure that fish are not jeopardized. The suite of reactions analyzed and recommended in the BiOp ensures that listed stocks are not jeopardized and can recover.

Q. Aren't some of the runs facing extinction? Can this plan really help?

A. The science analysis in the plan looked at four "indicators" of species health to determine the status of the listed stocks: abundance, productivity, population growth and spatial diversity. Data from the population level was "rolled up" to the species-listing level. The proposed measures are expected to contribute to recovery for all listed stocks (except sockeye, defined as "functionally extinct").

Q. Isn't it true that only removal of the Lower Snake dams will recover the listed fish?

A. It is true that some very narrow interests continue calling for dam removal which explains why they won't support this or any other Biological Opinion. Removal does not make sense from a number of perspectives: 1) it is the highest-cost, most draconian outcome as compared to measures that can and are being taken to help salmon; 2) in a world concerned with climate change, an independent analysis by the Northwest Power and Conservation staff shows that 5.2 million tons of CO₂ would be added to the atmosphere each year with if the dams were removed. Also, removal would required goods to be trucked vs. barged which would significantly increase costs and add to CO₂ production. Finally, dam removal can only be authorized by Congress, not through a BiOp or Recovery Plan.

Q. Does this BiOp take a comprehensive approach to improving salmon runs?

A. No. Far more needs to be done in the areas of hatchery overproduction and attendant fish harvesting. The BiOp's science analysis shows that these areas are creating serious problems for listed stocks, but the plan is short on specific actions in these areas. Also, these impacts can be directly addressed in the harvest management Biological Opinion being developed right now in the US v OR proceeding. The two BiOp's need to used the same data and analysis and be linked up to ensure that all major limiting factors affecting the fish are addressed NOAA-Fisheries is the agency responsible for ensuring this occurs.