



Lower Columbia River Plan: 12-Year Assessment December 12, 2025

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TOPIC

Lower Columbia River Conservation and Recovery Plan: 12-Year Assessment

BACKGROUND

The *Lower Columbia River Conservation and Recovery Plan for Oregon Populations of Salmon and Steelhead* (Plan) (OAR 635-500-6575) was approved by the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission (Commission) in August 2010. The Plan serves as both a conservation plan for Lower Columbia River (LCR) salmon and steelhead populations under Oregon's Native Fish Conservation Policy and a component of the federal recovery plan for four species listed as threatened under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA):

- LCR Coho Salmon Evolutionary Significant Unit (ESU)
- LCR Chinook Salmon ESU
- Columbia River Chum Salmon ESU
- LCR Steelhead Distinct Population Segment (DPS)

The Plan covers LCR salmon and steelhead populations in Oregon from Youngs Bay to Hood River, including tributaries to the Willamette River below Willamette Falls. Coho salmon in this area are listed as endangered under the Oregon ESA. This area also includes several steelhead populations downstream from the Willamette River that are part of the Southwest Washington Steelhead DPS, which is not listed under the federal ESA.

The Plan provides a framework and roadmap for attaining recovery and delisting under the ESA, as well as achieving more ambitious broad sense recovery goals that will provide significant ecological, cultural and economic benefits. Recovery and delisting will require uplift in LCR salmon and steelhead populations in Oregon and Washington, and the Plan is one component of a comprehensive LCR recovery plan developed by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). The Plan is intended to be implemented within a 25-year timeframe, although desired delisting and broad sense goals are not necessarily expected to be achieved within this timeframe, given lag time between action completion and both habitat and population responses.

To track progress toward Plan goals and inform adaptive management, the Plan calls for annual implementation reports and a comprehensive review of the Plan 12 years after approval by the Commission. The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (department) has completed the first

12-year assessment (Attachments 1-4) following guidance in the Plan. The purpose of this informational agenda item is to present the results of the 12-year assessment to the Commission and solicit Commission and public feedback on the assessment before it is finalized by the department.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The Plan was developed through a multi-year, collaborative process led by department, with extensive participation by the Oregon Governor's Natural Resources Office, NMFS, and the Oregon Lower Columbia River Stakeholder and Planning Teams. Public comment was solicited at several points during the Plan development process and incorporated into the final document.

The 12-year assessment was developed by the department based on direction in the Plan and was distributed to the LCR Implementation Team for review and comment in advance of the Commission hearing. The Implementation Team is a diverse group representing government agencies, watershed councils and other non-governmental organizations, and other interested parties. The public will have an opportunity to provide feedback on the 12-year assessment through the department's website.

ASSESSMENT

The first 12-year assessment of the Plan considers monitoring data and implementation actions through 2022. The assessment includes:

- (1) An evaluation of progress toward federal ESA delisting goals for LCR salmon and steelhead ESUs and constituent populations based on measurable criteria identified in the Plan (Attachment 1; Attachment 4);
- (2) A review of implementation progress and effectiveness of restoration and management actions, including trends in habitat (Attachment 1; Attachment 2);
- (3) A review of climate and ocean change projections relevant to Plan species, climate change vulnerability, and adaptation strategies and actions to ameliorate potential negative impacts and promote population resilience (Attachment 1); and
- (4) An evaluation of progress and an update to Oregon's Columbia River Chum Recovery Strategy (Attachment 1; Attachment 3).

Key findings of this 12-year assessment are:

- Progress toward recovery goals varied among populations during the first 12 years of Plan implementation. In general, salmon and steelhead populations in the Clackamas and Sandy basins (Cascade stratum) attained or made significant progress toward delisting scenario goals, while populations in other strata (Coastal and Gorge) did not.

- Most of the 307 actions identified in the plan to address threats and limiting factors have been implemented, are in progress, or are ongoing. Goals for limiting harvest impacts were generally achieved and the percent of hatchery fish on the spawning grounds (pHOS) is below plan limits or declining in most populations.
- Strong habitat restoration programs in the Clackamas, Sandy and Hood basins achieved or made significant progress towards restoration goals identified in the plan. Capacity of organizational partners played a major role in getting projects on the ground.
- Climate change is expected to exacerbate existing limiting factors and threats, and some populations are particularly vulnerable. Habitat protection, restoration, and enhancement are the key to reducing climate change risk and achieving recovery. Many actions to mitigate climate change risks and prepare for the future have occurred in the LCR since plan approval, and implementation partners will need to build on these actions to achieve delisting and broad sense recovery goals.
- Achieving desired status goals in the Plan will require long-term, sustained action. Furthermore, uplift across the entire ESU, including populations in Washington, will be needed to achieve recovery and delisting. The 12-year assessment identifies priority actions from the Plan that have not been fully implemented or realized, as well as new actions that will contribute to recovery. These actions do not represent a major shift in the overall direction of recovery efforts, and the Plan remains the blueprint for achieving desired status for LCR salmon and steelhead populations.

This first 12-year assessment of Plan measurable criteria indicates that most Oregon populations within the LCR ESU have not yet achieved delisting goals or the more ambitious broad sense recovery goals identified in the Plan. This result is consistent with expectation that the Plan is a 25-year plan and that desired delisting and broad sense goals are not necessarily expected to be achieved within this timeframe, given lag time between action completion and both habitat and population responses.

The department and our partners are looking forward to implementing the new, on-going and remaining actions over the next 12 years. Recovery of LCR salmon and steelhead populations will continue to face challenges from climate and ocean change, new and existing land development, and changes in implementation resources and capacity. The Plan and the priority actions identified in this assessment will continue to be the primary guide for navigating these challenges.