

Lower Columbia River (LCR) Conservation and Recovery Plan 12 – Year Assessment Review

The “LCR conservation and recovery plan 12 -year review” is an impressive document that is extremely detailed and well written. This assessment delineates a tremendous amount of effort that has been expended to avoid any further listing of the salmonid populations in this region, but more importantly to recover these populations and achieve their viability.

If a reviewer of this assessment was not from the Pacific Northwest and had no knowledge of the history of the Columbia River basin they would be confused by why are hatcheries even operating in this watershed. Throughout this document, pHOS is referred to as a measure to avoid listing of a particular salmonid population. This sends the message to the reader that hatcheries are a key impediment to recovery of these populations of concern. It appears that from this document’s standpoint hatcheries are an unnecessary risk. There are few references in this document that support hatcheries. The intent of most hatcheries on the Columbia River is to attempt to mitigate for the loss of salmonid habitat or direct loss of salmon and steelhead through human activities. Dams and water diversions can be examples of not only the loss of habitat due to reducing fish passage and overall changes to stream ecosystems, but that they also directly kill salmon and steelhead as juveniles pass through powerhouses or are diverted into irrigation systems. Alterations in stream channels and the loss of diversity within the water courses is another significant cause for the decline in populations in the LCR. The economic impact of both recreational and commercial fisheries supported by Columbia River salmonids is estimated to exceed one-half billion dollars. Currently there are thousands of people that rely on Columbia River salmonid populations to support their household and their communities.

Historically there were 15 million salmon spawning in the Columbia River Basin. Today there are under one million salmonids entering the river. Hatcheries are essential components of today’s Columbia River fisheries.

This document also states that hatcheries increase predation on naturally produced salmonid juveniles. There are more documentations of hatchery fish reducing predation on naturally produced juveniles. Large scale releases of juvenile salmonids in Knappa Slough and Youngs Bay are just two documented areas where avian and pinnipeds are predating on almost exclusively hatchery fish.

A welcomed addition to this document would be simple statement that the hatchery system in the LCR is necessary to mitigate for the loss of naturally produced salmonids because of the critical fisheries that hatchery fish support and the resulting economic benefits.

This document as it is written gives more fuel to the anti-hatchery groups which costs ODFW funds through litigation and eventually reduced license sales as fisheries are curtailed.