

MYTHBUSTERS

FISH AND WILDLIFE MYTHS ABOUT THE NORTHWEST HYDROELECTRIC SYSTEM



Ice Harbor Dam on the Lower Snake River.

Myth No. 2:
Salmon and steelhead
will recover by removing
the four Lower
Snake River dams.

THE FACTS: A SCIENTIFIC OVERVIEW

◆ **The four Lower Snake River dams affect only four of the 13 salmon and steelhead stocks in the Columbia River Basin listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA)**

Only four salmon and steelhead stocks listed under the ESA inhabit the Snake River: spring/summer chinook salmon, fall chinook salmon, sockeye salmon and steelhead.

◆ **Removing the four dams will not significantly improve access to historic salmon and steelhead spawning grounds in the Snake River**

Construction of the four Lower Snake River dams inundated only about 10 percent of available fall chinook habitat in the Snake River Basin. The impact on habitat for other salmon stocks was even lower. Primary spawning grounds upstream from the four dams was blocked by older dams or affected by logging, mining and water diversion before the Lower Snake River dams were built.

◆ **Removing the four dams will not provide significantly higher fish survival**

The Lower Snake River dams are run-of-the-river dams. They do not affect the volume of water in the river. Juvenile and adult fish readily pass these dams. The survival rate of juvenile salmon and steelhead passing the dams is near or above

95 percent. Surface bypass systems have been installed at three of the four dams, with the fourth dam scheduled for a bypass system installation in 2009. The goal of the bypass systems is to increase the juvenile survival rate.

◆ **Removing the four dams will negatively affect the Northwest's economy and environment**

Removal of the Lower Snake River dams will eliminate their emissions-free, renewable energy; increase carbon dioxide pollution through replacement power, which likely will be fossil fuel generation; eliminate millions of dollars worth of cargo transportation on the inland waterway; and reduce farmers' ability to produce crops because of lost irrigation.

◆ **Fish and wildlife agencies annually receive millions of dollars from the region's ratepayers to fund mitigation projects**

From 1978 through 2007, the Bonneville Power Administration distributed nearly \$2.3 billion to the region's fish and wildlife agencies for fish mitigation projects. The Northwest Power and Conservation Council found that only about 60 percent of the funds provided to the states and tribes was used to help fish and wildlife resources via on-the-ground projects.

◆ **Read more about fish and wildlife myths at www.ruralite.org/mythbusters**

Source: Public Power Council, based on research collected from state and federal agencies, universities and the private sector.