

MYTHBUSTERS

FISH AND WILDLIFE MYTHS ABOUT THE NORTHWEST HYDROELECTRIC SYSTEM

Myth No. 5
Little has been done to
improve fish survival
past the federal dams.



A tugboat pulls a spillway weir through the locks at McNary Dam on the Columbia River in October 2007. The weir was positioned in one of the spillways at Lower Monumental Dam on the Snake River to improve juvenile fish passage. Photo by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

THE FACTS: A SCIENTIFIC OVERVIEW

◆ Significant improvements have been made, and continue to be made, at federal dams to enhance salmon and steelhead survival

From the early 1990s through 2006, more than \$2.5 billion was invested to develop and install new and improved fish passage facilities at the four federal dams on the Lower Columbia River and the four federal dams on the Snake River.

- Screens have been installed in front of turbines to keep juvenile fish from entering. Bypass systems have been built to collect juvenile fish and route them around dams. "Fish slides" and other surface bypass systems that pass fish safely over dams have been installed at all eight dams.
- Spill and flow changes have cost more than \$5 billion in lost generation and opportunity costs. Large spills are detrimental to fish health, and a balance of river conditions is necessary for safe passage of juvenile and adult salmon.
- Turbines are operated within 1 percent of the ideal hydraulic efficiency to reduce turbulence and create safer juvenile fish passage.

◆ Improvements to fish and wildlife habitat and hatchery programs is ongoing

Ratepayers have funded more than \$1.8 billion for building and operating hatcheries, improving fish and wildlife habitat, such

as spawning and rearing habitat in tributaries, and protecting wildlife habitat for waterfowl and large mammals.

◆ Barge transportation improves downstream survival of juvenile salmon and steelhead passing through the federal hydro system

More than 98 percent of juvenile salmon and steelhead collected and transported past federal dams survive the trip to their release below Bonneville Dam, the last dam on the Columbia River before the Pacific Ocean.

◆ Ratepayers will fund nearly \$1 billion a year in fish and wildlife mitigation programs beginning in fiscal year 2010-2011

The federal biological opinion for the federal hydro system requires continued improvements for fish survival at the dams and fish habitat in the Columbia River tributaries, including spill, flow augmentation, turbine operations, fish collection and transportation, hatcheries and funds for the Northwest Power and Conservation Council Fish and Wildlife Program.

◆ 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.