

MYTHBUSTERS

FISH AND WILDLIFE MYTHS ABOUT THE NORTHWEST HYDROELECTRIC SYSTEM

Myth No. 6
Predation is not a significant factor on salmon and steelhead mortality compared with the dams.



A Caspian tern carries a fish taken from the Columbia River estuary past other birds on East Sand Island. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers recently built tern habitat at Fern Ridge Lake, west of Eugene, Oregon, and Crump Lake, north of Adel, Oregon, as part of an effort to relocate terns away from the Columbia. Photo courtesy of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

THE FACTS: A SCIENTIFIC OVERVIEW

◆ Birds, fish and sea lions feed on salmon and steelhead in large quantities, significantly affecting the mortality of salmonid species in the Columbia River Basin

- Bird predators consume 4 percent to 21 percent of juvenile salmonids migrating downriver each year.
- Predatory fish consume 2 percent to 7 percent of the juvenile fall chinook salmon passing some dams. No basinwide estimates of fish predation are available.
- Sea lions every year consume an estimated 4 percent of adult spring chinook passing Bonneville Dam. This figure does not include salmon and steelhead taken by sea lions between the Columbia River estuary and Bonneville Dam.
- Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) customers will pay about \$9 million in 2009 for predation research and control programs.

◆ Actions are being taken to address predation, with more mitigation programs being planned

Some of the programs to reduce salmonid predation are paid for through the Columbia River Management Program of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers with federal

appropriations funding, as well as money from regional electricity ratepayers.

- **Bird predators:** The Corps is relocating Caspian terns away from habitat in the Columbia River. Exclusion wires are being installed at dams to reduce bird predation. Additional action could be taken to control populations of other predatory birds, such as cormorants, gulls and pelicans.
- **Fish predators:** The only program to control fish predators is the Northern Pikeminnow Management Program. Funded by BPA customers at about \$3 million a year, the program pays anglers to remove northern pikeminnow from the Columbia and Snake rivers. BPA estimates pikeminnow predation on salmonids has been cut by 30 percent. For other predatory fish, such as bass and walleye, states have been working to enhance these species for recreational opportunities and to increase fishing license sales.
- **Sea lions:** The Corps has initiated a program to monitor sea lion predation and to test methods for reducing predation rates, including relocation and "lethal take" of sea lions, a measure being litigated. BPA customers will pay about \$500,000 in 2009 for sea lion research and control measures.

◆ 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.