How the Mitchell Act Supports Fisheries

What is the Mitchell Act?
Congress passed the Mitchell Act in 1938 to advance the conservation of salmon and steelhead fishery resources in the Columbia River Basin. Mitchell Act funding has supported the establishment, operation, and maintenance of hatchery facilities in Oregon, Washington, and Idaho. In addition, the Mitchell Act funds monitoring and evaluation of hatchery programs, screening irrigation intakes, and improving fish passage. Since 1946, Congress has appropriated Mitchell Act funds on an annual basis. NOAA Fisheries has administered the Mitchell Act since 1970, distributing appropriations to tribes and Oregon, Washington, and Idaho to produce hatchery salmon and steelhead to support fisheries.

Benefits for the Columbia Basin and Beyond
The Mitchell Act currently supports 60 hatchery programs that enhance fisheries in the Columbia Basin, along the West Coast, and in Alaska. These funds produce roughly 42 million hatchery fish annually. This represents about 30 percent of the total hatchery salmon and steelhead released in the Columbia River Basin.

Sport, Tribal, and Commercial Fisheries
Salmon smolts from hatchery programs funded through the Mitchell Act translate into the harvest of about 250,000 fish that adds to commercial, recreational and tribal fisheries. Fish from the Columbia River Basin also reflect an important component of Canadian and Alaskan ocean fisheries.

Cultural Uses
Mitchell Act hatchery production supports tribal treaty fisheries in the mainstem Columbia River, its tributaries, and fisheries outside of the Columbia River Basin. These fisheries provide for ceremonial needs, subsistence, and economic benefit. Columbia River tribes use salmon in most ceremonies, celebrations, funerals, and other special events.

“...The salmon was put here by the Creator for our use as part of the cycle of life. It gave to us, and we, in turn, gave back to it through our ceremonies...Their returning meant our continuance was assured because the salmon gave up their lives for us...”

Carla High Eagle, Nez Perce Tribe

Other Benefits
Reintroduction of Coho Salmon
Mitchell Act funds have assisted tribal programs in reintroducing Coho Salmon to the interior Columbia River Basin, where they now support tribal and sport fisheries while developing self-sustaining populations.

Monitoring and Evaluation
Mitchell Act funds pay for marking fish prior to release so co-managers can monitor adult salmon and steelhead when they return to freshwater. This helps co-managers understand whether the program is meeting its goals.

Fish Passage
The Mitchell Act funds fish passage and screening for juvenile salmon and steelhead throughout the Columbia River Basin. The program has opened more than 7,000 miles of habitat through 112 fish passage projects throughout Oregon, Washington and Idaho. The Mitchell Act has also funded more than 2,600 irrigation screening projects.
Contributing to the Economy

Mitchell Act programs provide economic benefits to the people of the Columbia Basin, and the region, in terms of personal income from commercial and recreational harvest, and hatchery operations. The program sustains just over 1,300 full and part-time jobs that contribute $54 million in personal income.

Right: Table developed from data in the final Environmental Impact Statement, NOAA Fisheries 2014.

Assessing our Management Strategies

In 2014, NOAA Fisheries released a final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The EIS informs decisions on federally funded hatchery programs. The EIS evaluated the effects of alternative hatchery management strategies throughout the Columbia River Basin. NOAA Fisheries released a Biological Opinion under the Endangered Species Act and a NEPA Record of Decision in 2017 after carefully considering a range of comments received during public review.

Mitchell Act Expenditures

Most hatchery production funded under the Mitchell Act originally provided fish for ocean and in-river non-treaty commercial and recreational harvest. More recently, the Mitchell Act has also funded hatchery production to support tribal treaty harvest in the Columbia River and to conserve salmon protected under the Endangered Species Act. In recent years, annual funding has totaled around $15-25 million per year (see Figures 1 and 2 below).

For more information visit https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/west-coast/endangered-species-conservation/mitchell-act-hatchery-programs

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