

“Salmon First” Scenario

Theme

For Columbia River tribal nations, the goals for salmon and steelhead remain the same as they were in the 1800s. Before the states of Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana, and Nevada existed, salmon and steelhead populations were healthy, self-sustaining, and the water they depended on, unallocated, unsullied, and unblocked. For tribes that signed treaties facilitating non-tribal settlement, the right to fish at usual and accustomed places was retained. This right also includes a habitat component that others should not engage in habitat-damaging activities that would diminish the abundance of salmon and prevent tribes from earning a moderate living through fishing. Regrettably, this has not been the case for salmon or tribes. Now is the time for the region to treat the needs of the salmon as a paramount objective to achieve and to restore them once again to healthy, self-sustaining, and harvestable levels.

In line with the “Tribal Perspective” of Phase 1, one of the intentions of the “Salmon First” scenario is to avoid normalizing the status quo or perpetuating the “false equivalencies” among sovereigns and stakeholders on “remaining whole.” This scenario aims to achieve the fastest possible response to declining populations of salmon and steelhead with emphasis on the following philosophies:

- The baseline for tribal salmon restoration and harvest is 1855 – there is a large gap between current conditions and the baseline.
- Broad tribal alignment exists for an immediate call to action by the region to reverse the decline of salmon and steelhead;
- Implementation of biological strategies needs to be immediate. At the co-management level, tribes have been involved in trying to reverse declines since the late 1970s and are not willing to wait another 25 years for “new aspirational” scenario planning implementation to meet tribal cultural, subsistence, and economic needs;
- Regional talking points need to change from, “how do we get enough salmon to meet everyone’s needs” to “what can we do to meet the needs of salmon”;
- Over a century of anthropogenic modifications to the river system, such as redirection or impoundment of water and introduction of non-native species, has created an ecosystem that is unnatural and growing increasingly inhospitable to salmon and steelhead. In order for salmon and steelhead to thrive at healthy and harvestable levels, the region needs to return the river to a more normative state, and to conditions suitable for salmon, especially as climate change exacerbates the already inhospitable conditions in the Columbia River;
- The long-game of the “Salmon First” Scenario is to have salmon and steelhead in all places that they historically inhabited, but with an understanding that certain geopolitical relationships, agreements, and continuing dialogue may allow certain goals to be attained sooner than others;
- The “Salmon First” Scenario requires the Pacific Northwest to integrate salmon recovery into everyday decision making at the local, state, and federal levels;

- An expectation that all scenarios devise a slider model baseline that does not treat hatchery production as a negative impact on recovery, but as a necessary tool to support recovery;
- An expectation that Columbia Basin hatchery mitigation funding and supplementation will be necessary while the factors/structures that caused the need for mitigation in the first place remain the primary issues negatively impacting recovery. This also includes the use of hatcheries to reintroduce extirpated stocks below and above blocked areas; and
- The “Salmon First” Scenario aims to achieve tribal goals in a manner that benefits all with an emphasis on getting more fish back in the river (i.e., doing what must be done to making salmon and its habitat “whole”).

Additional Scenario Description

The “Salmon First” Scenario maximizes effort in the near term on all fronts toward achieving goals as soon as possible, consistent with fair allocation of the conservation burden and Treaty/Trust obligations the Federal government has to Indian tribes. The scenario recognizes challenges and threats of climate to the modified river system and makes strategic choices in light of related risks, but with the goal of restoring all fish in all places; including blocked areas that were historically accessible to anadromous fish.

Regional Considerations

The scenario recognizes regional/sub basin differences in stock composition, population status, management efforts and jurisdictional boundaries. Specific strategies affect different stocks, groupings of stocks, or regions differently. The scenario allows for adjusted strategies that are specific to a region with coordinated efforts in the mainstem migration corridor.

Biological Strategies

- *Hydro*
 - With dams still in place, continue to implement aggressive spill program under existing configuration, as well as other efforts devoted toward reducing delayed mortality impacts derived from dam and reservoir passage, both downstream and upstream;
 - Begin immediate regional efforts to breach one or more dams and consider alternate forms of fish-friendly power generation and commerce;
 - Evaluate future passage/reintroduction options in blocked regions within the Columbia Basin;
 - Implement operations to address flow and temperature effects from climate change;
 - Conduct outreach and education to the hydro customers on the historic and current impacts to tribal communities, benefits of salmon runs in the PNW, costs and benefits of maintaining the hydrosystem relative to other alternative forms of energy.
- *Tributary Habitat*

- At the outset, substantially increase basin-wide habitat restoration actions and ensure that efforts strategically target populations and habitat limiting factors that will provide the greatest contribution to long-term recovery goals;
- Maximize restoration efforts to conserve habitats least vulnerable to climate change or most likely to improve climate resilience;
- Conduct research, monitoring and evaluation as necessary to quantify physical and biological benefits from tributary habitat restoration and determine whether habitat improvements can yield biological responses sufficient to meet recovery targets;
- Conduct outreach and education to local and state land and water management boards and committees to integrate salmon recovery into local decision (rule) making;
- Continue and increase efforts to alter management of water systems to provide more normative flow regimes.
- *Estuary Habitat*
 - Substantially increase level of effort to maximize estuary habitat restoration.
- *Blocked areas*
 - Proceed incrementally as laid out in existing plans;
 - Explore and begin to implement experimental reintroduction with interim hatchery supplementation concurrent with evaluation of passage potential;
 - Maximize/expedite studies to reintroduce fish into blocked areas (Chief Joe/ Grand Coulee and Hells Canyon Complex) including habitat restoration above Hells Canyon Complex (HCC) to prepare for eventual passage at HCC. Ramp up efforts to expand distribution in tributary habitat (e.g., Cowlitz, Lewis, Willamette Basin, Deschutes, Yakima, etc.) and address any other significant blockages in tributaries¹;
- *Predation*
 - Identify and implement targeted opportunities to enhance predator control actions;
 - Population scale removals of non-native/introduced species;
 - Increase funding for control efforts related to past or present federal and state introductions of non-native fish species;
 - Eliminate harvest limits and regulations protecting non-native fish in waters that contain or are connected to waters containing anadromous salmon and steelhead;
 - Increase funding for federal, state, and tribal enforcement to reduce illegal or unintentional introduction of invasive/non-native species;
 - Identify and implement targeted opportunities to enhance predator control actions, including predation impacts related to climate effects (e.g., non-native fish range expansion due to dams and climate change);
 - Modify or remove anthropogenic structures that have increased predators or that make salmon and steelhead more vulnerable to predation at all life stages.
- *Hatchery*

¹ It is recognized some sovereigns are constrained in consideration of this issue.

- Ensure that hatchery programs with a mitigation responsibility are fully and adequately funded;
 - Adequately fund routine and non-routine maintenance and support modernization of hatchery infrastructure to ensure achievement of mitigation goals;
 - Prioritize hatchery production in areas where restoration and mitigation goals have not been met;
 - Identify areas suitable for reintroduction and implement reintroduction programs;
 - Continue to improve hatchery programs using the best available science to minimize risks to natural populations;
 - Prepare for the likely role that hatchery programs and infrastructure will play in buffering against fluctuating environments and stochastic climate events;
 - Implement sliding scale protocol for hatchery production as natural abundance increases and proves resilient;
 - Reevaluate mitigation hatchery production when dams have been removed and the historic impacts of those dams have been fully mitigated.
- *Harvest*
 - Ensure that conservation burden is appropriately allocated such that treaty harvest is not bearing a disproportionate amount of the responsibility, consistent with federal law;
 - Continue to set harvest impacts at levels that do not impede recovery through use of abundance-based management frameworks or other relevant harvest management approaches (e.g., tribal fisheries in the mainstem Columbia and in tributaries are implemented currently to target more abundant stocks while protecting weaker, less abundant stocks);
 - Run-timing of salmon and steelhead is highly heritable; therefore, fishery effort needs to be balanced to ensure mixed stock fisheries (sport and commercial) are not artificially changing run-timing (e.g., overharvesting the earliest run Spring Chinook or upriver bright Summer Chinook);
 - Establish or continue to use existing sliding scale tribal harvest schedules that increases the rate of harvest as runs increase (recognizing that these scales are designed for the low-end goals in Figure 2 of Phase 1 Report of the Columbia Basin Partnership Task Force of the Marine Fisheries Advisory Committee).
 - Consider in-river refuges/sanctuaries that protect migrating salmon and steelhead;
 - Reduce non-treaty “sport fishery footprint” or impact limits as may be necessary to address conservation and recovery across the abundance range (e.g., limiting or eliminating catch-and-release fishing during warm water periods);
 - As natural returns of salmon and steelhead approach high-range goals, work towards ending the need for mark-selective fisheries;
 - Eliminate non-consumptive fishery impacts on salmon and steelhead when fish are actively spawning.

Social, Cultural, Economic and Ecosystem Considerations and Strategies

- Tribal dependence on salmon and other fish species to meet dietary, spiritual, cultural, economic and basic subsistence needs is still a prevailing necessity of tribal culture and society. Prioritize tribal ceremonial, subsistence and commercial needs and fishing-based economy;
- Historic benefits should be weighed in comparison to future impacts. The economic sectors that may be impacted have benefitted the most;
- Stepwise implementation of dam removal will be less disruptive. Allows evaluation and adaptive management;
- Ensures that existing mitigation commitments are met. Currently there is a lack of accountability on meeting those obligations;
- Most likely scenario to address Treaty obligations by federal government;
- Benchmarks should be set at 2 generations of salmon (10 years). Goal should be to see improvements immediately.

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