



Model Watershed News

QUARTERLY NEWS ABOUT RESTORING FISH IN CENTRAL IDAHO

SUMMER 1993

The Lemhi, Pahsimeroi and East Fork of the Salmon River Model Watershed Project was initiated in the fall of 1992 with a grant from the Bonneville Power Administration.

The objectives of this project are to (1) protect, enhance and restore anadromous and resident fish habitat and (2) achieve and maintain a balance between resource protection and resource use on a holistic watershed basis.

Guided by a community advisory committee, the planning component of the project should be completed in 1994.

This comprehensive and holistic approach to watershed planning and management has not been applied to fish and wildlife in Idaho before. What we learn here, we hope to apply to other watersheds. Through this quarterly newsletter we will keep you informed about this important local effort.

"Idaho continues to work hard to protect its fish habitat and, once again, local residents will have significant input in the plan's development."

- Idaho Governor Cecil D. Andrus

Outgrowth of 1990 Meeting



MODEL WATERSHED PROJECT AREA

Today's news is that the chinook salmon are threatened with extinction from the Salmon River. Tomorrow's history be that they are!

In January 1990 residents and irrigators of the Lemhi River system met to discuss irrigation procedures. Most felt a need for change.

If something wasn't done to help with the migration of fish in the river, they believed outside interests would intervene. They knew what they wanted: a system that would be beneficial to irrigators, fish and the public.

Some problem areas were outlined and An Irrigators Plan to Improve Fish Passage in the Lemhi River was developed. That plan resulted in the Model Water Conservation Demonstration Project which started in March 1992 on the Lemhi River and the Model Watershed Project. The project encompasses the Lemhi River, Pahsimeroi River, and East Fork of the Salmon Rivers which have a combined drainage area of approximately 2735 square miles.

Administration

This Model Watershed Project is an outgrowth of the Northwest Power Planning Council's Columbia River Basin Fish and Wildlife Program. The goal of that program is to double salmon production in the Columbia River Basin without losing biological diversity. Under Congressional mandate, the Bonneville Power Administration must fund the mitigation and enhancement measures called for in the program.

Governor Cecil D. Andrus named the Idaho Soil Conservation Commission the lead agency for this project to coordinate model watershed program activities. An SCC project coordinator is assisting the Lemhi and Custer Soil and Water Conservation Districts with planning.

The Problem

Fish redd counts have occurred in all three drainages since about 1960. These counts are an indication of the numbers of fish returning to each drainage.

This past year only 15 redds were counted in the Lemhi as compared to nearly 1,300 in 1961. This has occurred proportionately in all drainages of the Salmon River.

The Advisory Committee has chosen to tackle the problem under three categories:

1. Migration Habitat
2. Rearing Habitat
3. Spawning Habitat

Migration habitat, including the migration of fish from the mouth of the Columbia River to the Three drainages, was deemed to be the largest problem.

The Plan

The plan will identify resource conditions, management alternatives, economic factors and social attitudes impacting the watershed.

Implementation of the plan in Lemhi and Custer counties could lead to the accelerated installation and monitoring of conservation practices. The plan itself is being guided by a 15 member Advisory Committee consisting of local residents, representatives of Indian Tribes and conservation groups.

Twent-six resource managers from state and federal agencies lend technical assistance.

The individuals who have agreed to serve on these committees are listed on the back page of this newsletter.

The Vision

The vision of the Advisory Committee is to provide a basis of coordination and cooperation between local, private, state, tribal and federal fish and land managers, land users, land owners and other affected entities to manage the biological, social and economic resources to protect, restore and enhance anadromous and resident fish habitat.

The Task

The work to be accomplished is significant. Together, the Advisory and Technical committees plan to:

- Identify existing management status, regulations, procedures, traditions, etc. which now guide and control watershed management.

- Establish effective "adaptive management" procedures to track, evaluate and, if needed, change watershed processes.

- Evaluate the overall condition of the watershed and its effects on the aquatic ecosystem and the fish and wildlife resources it supports.

- Identify those watershed conditions which are limiting the fish and wildlife resources; then develop the action plans to address those limiting factors.

- Establish ways to cooperatively implement and fund these actions among all interested parties.

- Establish an effective watershed monitoring and evaluation process.



35 Tour participants learn firsthand about diversion activity. (left to right) SCC Chairman, Bob Hull; Lemhi County Extension Agent, Bob Loucks; Lemhi Soil & Water Conservation District Chairman, Bruce Mulkey; Advisory Committee Member, Scott Turner.

Accomplishments

*A full-time project coordinator and part-time office coordinator were hired in January 1993.

*An office was established in Salmon in January.

*Almost 50 entities involved in the management of or having an interest in watershed resources have been identified; a communications network was established in March.

*Advisory and technical Committees for the project were formed on April 15.

*A vision statement, objectives and goals were developed at a joint Advisory and Technical Committee meeting on April 15; operating procedures have been drafted.

*The Technical Committee toured the East Fork of the Salmon River on May 13. A problem with stream bank erosion was identified and later corrected. The project was cost shared by ASCS and operator Ed Baker.

*Six groups have agreed to sign an operating agreement to implement An Irrigators Plan to Improve Fish Passage in the Lemhi.

*At least 13 possible funding sources have been identified.

*Current watershed monitoring activities have been identified and discussed.

*Presentations have been made to local groups such as the Rotary Club in Salmon, Salmon High School, Idaho Rivers United and Trout Unlimited.

What's Next...

*A tour of the Pahsimeroi will be held for the Advisory and Technical Committees, to get an overview of the problems and opportunities for fisheries habitat enhancement.

*A survey will be conducted among the 50 interested entities to gain input on the planning process.

*A meeting of biologists will be held to analyze one or all three basins.

*Barriers to total ecosystem management will be discussed with BLM and national forest representatives.

*The technical committee will draft suggestions on monitoring for the Advisory Committee's review.

*Planning will begin for a "Salmon Symposium" to be held in Salmon in April 1994.

*Different sections of the plan will be drafted by the end of September.

Coordinator's Comments

by Ralph Swift

I recall my father once telling me that today's news is often tomorrow's history.

Today's news is that the chinook salmon are threatened with extinction from the Salmon River.

Will tomorrow's history be that they are? Or, will it be that the people of Idaho and the Northwest said, "NO! This is too great a resource to lose."

I think they'll choose the latter because of the history these fish have in the drainage and the economic activity that a viable fish run brings.

Over the past year I have learned three things in dealing with the salmon issue: (1) the local people want to see a run of salmon return to the watersheds of the Salmon River, (2) the local people want to be involved and lead the planning effort, and (3) those same people are willing to make the sacrifices to see that this effort bears fruit.

We now have in place a formal committee structure to lead the planning effort. With this comes the responsibility to move forward, examine the problems in each sub-basin and make recommendations to solve the problem identification.

Calendar of Events

September - Pahsimeroi tour. Focus of tour will be on landowners perspective of habitat and effects of hatchery on anadromous fish in the drainage.

September 8 & 9 - Presentation to Northwest Power Planning Council in Pocatello.

September 16 - Lemhi SCD Range Ride. In Hayden Creek area to discuss livestock grazing and efforts made by permittees to improve riparian vegetation.

October - Committee meetings in all sub-basins to discuss action plan for watershed.

November 8-11 - IASCD Convention. Coeur d'Alene

November 17 & 18 - Public meeting in Salmon and Challis to discuss plans and alternatives.