

Staff summary of Issues & Recommendations Strongholds

*Preliminary draft, please refer to full recommendations for complete review

10/29/2013 10:06 AM

2009 Fish and Wildlife Program Section

Section II. D. 1. Habitat Strategies, Strongholds

II. Basinwide Provisions

C. Biological Objectives

1. Habitat Strategies (a, b, c) pg. 15

Overview

In the current program, a salmon, steelhead, or resident fish stronghold refers to a subbasin, watershed or other defined spatial area where populations are stronger and genetically more diverse than other areas. Recommendations direct the Council to work with others to develop criteria to identify strongholds and to establish a system of strongholds in the Columbia River Basin. Another recommendation is to prioritize native fish strongholds where a reasonable chance of eradicating non-natives exists and to create genetic strongholds with adequate buffers to shield them from invasive species.

Summary

Recommendations direct the Council to work with others to develop criteria for identifying strongholds, and establish a system of strongholds in the Columbia River Basin. Another recommendation is to prioritize native fish strongholds where there is: 1) a reasonable chance of eradicating non-natives; 2) opportunity to create genetic strongholds with adequate buffers to shield them from invasive species; 3) strong performance of native stocks; 4) the ability to manage for wild salmonids while excluding hatchery fish (hatchery-free zone); 5) the ability to monitor and evaluate the effect on wild native salmonids and to provide non-hatchery reference watershed for hatchery-wild stream comparisons.

The current program defines strongholds as areas with salmonid populations that are stronger and more genetically diverse, but doesn't include what is recommended by the Native Fish Society (NFS) and Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (MFWP) (i.e., the added layers of hatchery-free and non-native free). The program currently calls for the Council to work with other entities to identify these areas, and says that the Council *may* prioritize funding in stronghold areas. While the Council funds work in areas some might consider strongholds, the Council does not fund under any particular stronghold label, but rather takes a passive approach. A couple agencies suggested that the Council create a liaison position to help leverage shared investments that support implementation of subbasin plans, recovery plans, **salmon strongholds**, and other mitigation and conservation strategies.

Recommendations (All)

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (2)

Projects designed to eradicate or suppress nonnative species should be prioritized based on the site-specific level of threat represented by non-native species, the likelihood of successful mitigation, cost-effectiveness, and partnership opportunity. Top priority should be given to native species strongholds where there is a reasonable chance that nonnative species can be completely eradicated, and prevented from reinvasion. Ensure genetic reserves and strongholds for native fish and wildlife species. Create buffers around and migration pathways between isolated areas containing high species diversity. The Council and BPA can add value to AIS mitigation actions taken by federal, state, and tribal agencies by helping to coordinate efforts across jurisdictions. Inventories in the subbasin plans should be used to identify the remaining species strongholds, and areas where restoration actions have the greatest likelihood of success. Protect the best and restore the rest, beginning with areas where success is most probable.

Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (3)

From page 63, Program Reporting. Recommendation 2: The Council should work with fish and wildlife managers and land and water management entities to identify opportunities to coordinate BPA project funding with other funding sources as appropriate to accomplish shared goals. Fish and Wildlife Program funds could leverage shared investments that support implementation of subbasin plans, recovery plans, salmon strongholds, and other mitigation and conservation strategies. The Fish and Wildlife Program and Council should:

- Create a liaison position to assist project sponsors in identifying complimentary (cost-share) grants

Rationale: The ISAB Report “Using a Comprehensive Landscape Approach for More Effective Conservation and Restoration” provides several case histories of programs that employ socioeconomic engagement, a landscape perspective, governance and collaboration to work across traditional boundaries, leverage limited resources, and foster adaptive management (ISAB 2011-4). Among the reported lessons learned is that local organizations can be challenged to identify and generate funds needed to sustain investments, subbasin social engagement, integrated collaborative science and governance, and adaptive management. Tasking Council staff to reach out and coordinate with local watershed partnerships to help identify additional grant opportunities could better leverage BPA investments.

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (4)

Recommendation: Maintain 2009 language regarding strongholds.

Rationale: Strongholds refer to spatial areas where the performance of naturally spawning populations is stronger than other populations. Maintaining these populations is often more cost-effective than restoration. Thus maintaining strongholds emphasizes preservation of habitat and fish populations sustained by natural production.

Columbia Inter-Tribal Fish Commission (14)

See ODFW's recommendations above

Cowlitz Indian Tribe (22)

Recommends a Council liaison person to help assist with grants and other funding sources to help share investments in....strongholds...

Upper Snake River Tribes Foundation (28)

See ODFW's recommendations above

NOAA Fisheries (30)

Recommendation:

The Council should continue to work with regional entities to establish criteria for identification of stronghold areas within the Columbia River Basin. These strongholds should emphasize the preservation and restoration of habitat for wild fish. Measure: Develop criteria for identification of stronghold areas and identify a system of Columbia River Basin strongholds.

Native Fish Society (60)

Establish "Hatchery Free Zones" watersheds such as Wind River, Asotin Creek, Joseph Creek, John Day River, and Molalla River and implement a monitoring and evaluation of the biological response for wild native salmonid populations in these streams to provide a scientific basis for evaluating the hatchery experiment in the Columbia River Basin. In each ESU, MPG, DPS, SMU designate at least one watershed that is managed for wild salmonids by excluding hatchery fish. The purpose is to monitor and evaluate the effect on the wild native salmonids and to provide non-hatchery reference watershed to compare with the watersheds that allow naturally spawning hatchery fish.

2009 Program Language Pg. 15

a. Build from Strength

Efforts to improve the status of fish and wildlife populations in the basin should protect habitat that supports existing populations that are relatively healthy and productive. Adjacent habitats should be expanded if they have been historically productive or have a likelihood of sustaining healthy populations by reconnecting or improving habitat. In a similar manner, this strategy applies to the restoration of weak

stocks: The restoration should focus first on the habitat where portions of the weak populations are doing relatively well and then extend to adjacent habitats.

Strongholds

A salmon, steelhead, or resident fish stronghold refers to a subbasin, watershed or other defined spatial area where populations are stronger and genetically more diverse than other areas. The Council will work with regional entities to establish criteria for identification of stronghold areas within the Columbia River Basin. The Council may consider additional funding in these areas to provide further protection and to reduce impacts of limiting factors. Strongholds will emphasize the preservation and restoration of habitat for wild fish.

Restore Ecosystems, Not Just Single Species

Increasing the abundance of single populations may not, by itself, result in long-term recovery. Restoration efforts must focus on restoring habitats and developing ecosystem conditions and functions that will allow for expanding and maintaining diversity within and among species. This will help sustain a system of robust populations in the face of environmental variation.

c. Use Native Species Wherever Feasible

Even in degraded or altered environments, native species in native habitats provide the best starting point and direction for needed biological conditions in most cases. Where a species native to that particular habitat cannot be restored, then another species native to the Columbia River Basin should be used. Any proposal to produce or release nonnative species must overcome this strong presumption in favor of native species and habitats and be designed to avoid adverse impacts on native species.²

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