

History of the Hells Canyon Complex (E. 3.1-2, Chapter 2)

John W. Anderson

AFS Certified Fisheries Scientist

Cold Stream Consulting, P.O. Box 575 Baker City, OR 97814

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I. Introduction

“This chapter describes administrative and political processes that led to construction of the three-dam Hells Canyon Complex (HCC) by Idaho Power Company (IPC). The experimental measures adopted to maintain anadromous fish native to areas upstream of and within the HCC are summarized, and fish abundance and effects of the HCC on populations of salmon and steelhead are described. The chapter spans preconstruction planning for fish preservation, the failure of measures designed to collect and pass juvenile migrants, subsequent declines in fall chinook abundance, and decisions to transfer stocks to hatcheries in tributaries downstream of the HCC.” (Page 1, Paragraph 1)

II. Conclusion

1. *“In short, the mid-1950s were not conducive to regulators being able to ignore the societal forces that insisted on development at a rapid pace. However, we suggest that, even if agency personnel and developers had faced a more moderate pace of development, fish passage at the HCC still would have been impractical because of the scant knowledge of fish and mitigation tools available at the time.” (Page 37, Paragraph 3)*

Response:

The BLM agrees with this statement.

2. [The anadromous fish runs to the Snake River were in serious decline at the time of HCC closure. The biologists had very little time to gather information before HCC construction began and were continually in a reactive position when trying to maintain runs. All of their efforts to maintain the runs failed, and hatcheries were developed to save the remaining stocks of fish when it became apparent that the runs would soon become extinct due to the blockage.

The primary failure of the anadromous fish runs appears to have been caused by downstream passage of smolt through the HCC. The Brownlee Reservoir net barrier failed to capture juvenile fall chinook salmon in quantities necessary to protect the fish from the effects of the reservoir and dam. Less than 1% of the juvenile fall chinook salmon that entered the reservoir were captured. The addition of more dams in the Snake River below the HCC also added to the poor survival of both adults and juveniles. The dams on the Columbia and Snake rivers below the HCC had many adult and juvenile

passage problems that led to poor smolt to adult returns (SARs) in that period. Over-fishing is also credited with run declines at the time.] (Summary of Pages 6-36)

Response:

The BLM agrees that the chronology of events is informative and accurate. It provides insight into events that occurred from the time of construction through 1969 when anadromous fish bound for the Snake River basin above the HCC were all assigned to the hatchery mitigation program.

III. Study Adequacy

The study is adequate. The study provides an excellent chronology of events that led to the demise of the wild runs of salmon and steelhead destined for the Snake River above the HCC. It clearly depicts the efforts to pass anadromous fish and the events that led to assigning the stocks to present day hatchery programs.

IV. BLM Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusion

This is a thorough review of events that led to the fisheries agencies adopting a hatchery program when efforts failed to pass anadromous fish upstream and downstream at the HCC.

Recommendations

The BLM should accept the information as valid.