

Sea Lion Fact Sheet

C o l u m b i a R i v e r I n t e r - T r i b a l F i s h C o m m i s s i o n

- In the last five years there has been a 382% increase in the number of salmon eaten by sea lions at Bonneville Dam. Sea lions prey on spring runs of threatened and endangered adult salmonids as they attempt to enter and pass through the dam's fish ladders. Many sea lions have been documented returning year after year.
- Over the past four years, an average of 3,300 salmonids per year has been consumed in the tailrace of the dam alone. NOAA estimates that the removal of up to 150 sea lions under section 120 could decrease the number of salmonids consumed by sea lions by 50,500.
- A full-scale hazing and deterrence program has seen limited effectiveness over the past three years, however coupling it with the lethal take tool should lead to greater success.
- The California Sea Lion is a species neither threatened nor endangered. Their population is estimated at a historic high of 238,000. It is stable and has reached Optimal Sustainable Population (OSP), the goal set forth in the Marine Mammal Protection Act.
- As the population of California Sea Lions has exploded coast-wide, so have impacts to vulnerable fish populations.
- CRITFC supports the implementation of task force recommendations for the MMPA Section 120 application by Oregon/ Washington and Idaho for lethal removal of nuisance California Sea Lions impacting threatened and endangered Columbia River salmonids.
- The 18 member MMPA task force, a diverse group of tribal, federal & state representatives, NGO's, and independent scientists, brought diverse insights and perspectives to the table. All issues received thorough and satisfactory vetting. The task force approved the States' application (17 to 1).
- In 2008 California sea lions were observed preying on 4,230 salmonids immediately below Bonneville Dam. The total pinniped abundance at Bonneville Dam and their total catch of salmonids reached record levels.
- On March 18, 2008 NOAA approved the lethal take of up to 1% of the Potential Biological Removal (about 85 animals) nuisance sea lions from Bonneville Dam.
- Following this decision, the states began removing nuisance sea lions by relocating them to zoological and aquarium facilities across the country.
- The states' 2008 relocation efforts ended temporarily following an incident at Bonneville Dam. Measures are being taken to prevent any future incidents.
- CRITFC has secured funding under the Columbia Basin Fish Accords that will support hazing and abundance and predation estimation efforts for the next ten years. This project includes boat-based hazing in collaboration with the states, acoustic telemetry research to study sea lion movements, and the development of a video-based system to enumerate sea lions and predation in areas beyond the Corps of Engineers observation area.
- A lawsuit has been filed by two NGOs and two private citizens challenging NOAA's decision. On November 26, 2008 U.S. District Judge Michael Mosman in the U.S. District Court of Oregon categorically rejected the humane society arguments and found that NMFS' decision was sound. The case is currently before the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals.

The Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission (CRITFC) consists of the Nez Perce Tribe, Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon, and the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Indian Nation.

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NOAA's findings and letter to the states is available, in its entirety, on their website:
www.nmfs.noaa.gov.

