

# COLUMBIA RIVER INTER-TRIBAL FISH COMMISSION

## Sea Lion Predation at Bonneville Dam

- 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.
- Most notably the Lake Washington winter steelhead population was rendered functionally extinct after several years of sea lion exploitation at the Ballard Locks fish ladder.
- 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.
- CRITFC's member tribes commend the states of Washington, Oregon and Idaho for making this application.
- 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).
- The MMPA task force recommended to NOAA a framework for lethal take. Lethal take would be focused on a list of highly identifiable sea lions that have been observed at Bonneville Dam in past years. The task force also suggested a criteria to add individuals to the list.
- On January 17<sup>th</sup> 2008 NOAA released a draft environmental assessment (EA) recommending the annual lethal removal of up to 30 sea lions from Bonneville Dam to lessen their impact to endangered salmon.
- CRITFC anticipates that lethal take authority will be granted by the Secretary of Commerce and implemented by March of 2008, in time for the 2008 spring salmon run.
- Several methods of lethal removal are available. All will occur under humane guidelines by trained individuals.
- An alternative to lethal removal is the permanent relocation of nuisance sea lions to zoological and aquarium facilities across the country.
- NOAA's draft assessment is available, in its entirety, on their website: [www.nmfs.noaa.gov](http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov). The agency plans to release its final decision on the states' application in late March.

### Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission

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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