

Work Plan for Federal Caucus FY 2018 Project
to
Support Recovery of Salmon and Steelhead in the Columbia River Basin

January 2018

Purpose and Goal

The purpose of this project is to identify past and future planned federal actions to support recovery of endangered species act (ESA) listed salmon and steelhead in the Columbia Basin. This project will assess whether those actions and programs are adequate to support delisting, and if not, this project will identify which federal actions and programs can be leveraged to address continuing limiting factors and threats for ESA listed species. This project will enable the Federal Caucus to understand how federal agencies can best support continued species' biological viability improvements, as well as addressing a species' threats criteria identified in ESA recovery plans. The National Marine Fisheries Service makes its ESA species status review and delisting decisions based on an analysis of both the biological viability criteria and threats criteria.

This one-year project will seek to address the following questions:

- Based on the 2016 National Marine Fisheries Service 5-year Status Review, what are the most important threats and limiting factors that need to be addressed to improve species viability, and which of these threats and limiting factors can federal agencies help to address?
- What has been accomplished by federal agencies that has contributed to improved viability and current status of the species (e.g., BOR's Yakima Basin Integrated Plan)?
- What are the remaining and future recovery needs, and how can federal agency actions improve viability and address these needs?

Recognizing that this can be a lot of work to do all the Columbia Basin ESA-listed species, we identified and applied the following criteria to focus our work on a species and geographic area to meet our one-year timeframe:

- Is there a strong near-term potential for ESA-listed delisting based on species viability metrics (e.g., abundance, productivity, spatial structure, and genetic variability)?
- Is there a current well-organized and active engagement by local state, tribal, and federal partners in on-going recovery activities?
- Is there a strong likelihood that Federal Caucus agency engagement can make a difference and promote recovery by addressing one or more species limiting factors?

- Are existing federal agency activities and programs currently being implemented?
- Is there a strong potential for several communication stories that can be written about ESA recovery and focused federal actions?

Based on these criteria, we have selected the ESA-listed Middle Columbia River steelhead distinct population segment (DPS) as the focus species and geographic area for this Federal Caucus project. This review can serve as a template to potentially expand this FY 2018 Federal Caucus initiative to support recovery and delisting of other ESA-listed salmon and steelhead species in the Columbia River Basin.

This work plan will be carried out by a Federal Caucus Recovery Focus Team made up of one staff member from federal agencies working in the Middle Columbia River geographic area. The Federal Caucus will identify a staff person to represent their agency on this team for FY 2018.

Background

During the Federal Caucus' 2017 annual off-site meeting, the topic of how to promote recovery of ESA-listed salmon and steelhead in the Columbia Basin was identified as a proposed focus theme for the Federal Caucus' FY 2018 work plan. The idea of recovery as a focus area was driven by the circumstance that several recovery related activities have recently been completed, or are near completion in 2018. This includes the recent completion of the final recovery plans for salmon and steelhead species, the recent completion of NMFS' 5-year status reviews, the conclusions of the 2008 BiOp and Accords, and many other related efforts contributed to the idea that many recovery pieces are now in place and it is time to take stock of our progress and look at next steps.

During the off-site meeting, Caucus members brainstormed several ideas for how to investigate this topic: (1) identify species recovery needs, (2) identify technical needs, and (3) identify issues that the Federal Caucus can address. This can be done through technical briefings with local recovery leads in order to identify remaining limiting factors, and a menu of actions and policy issues to collectively support recovery. It was agreed that the Caucus should explore if there are actionable items where the Federal Caucus agencies can bring Federal Caucus resources to bear on key issues and recovery tasks to support ESA recovery. The federal executives endorsed this FY 2018 recovery theme at their October 2, 2017 annual meeting in Portland.

In 2000, the Federal Caucus developed an "All H" recovery strategy paper. Subsequently, in 2009 - 2011, the Federal Caucus conducted a study on Middle Columbia River steelhead to (1) evaluate if federal actions are adequate to achieve delisting, and (2) identify recommended federal actions for each Middle Columbia River steelhead major population group. It also evaluated research, monitoring, and evaluation (RM&E) efforts in the Middle-Columbia subbasins to determine if RM&E is adequate to identify when recovery goals are met.

This proposed work plan should review and evaluate the potential to build on the results of these previous Federal Caucus studies to identify where focused federal agency action can make significant progress toward the species reaching delisting.

Proposed Federal Caucus FY 2018 ESA Recovery Work Plan: The following tasks are proposed for consideration by the Federal Caucus Recovery Focus Team as they develop their FY 2018 work plan for this project.

1. Review proposal with Federal Caucus, revise proposal as needed, and confirm work plan assignment and agreement to commit staff for a Federal Caucus standing team – Federal Caucus meeting: December 2017.
2. Identify staff and form a Federal Caucus standing team to implement this project, provide Middle Columbia River steelhead background information to team, confirm work plan schedule, and begin work – January 2018.
3. Communicate with National Marine Fisheries Service and Middle Columbia River Steelhead Steering Committee to identify how to work together, information needed, and strategy for implementing this project. – January - February 2018
4. Meet with NMFS and Northwest Fisheries Science Center (NWFSC) staff to be briefed on 2016 ESA 5-year status review for Middle Columbia River steelhead and 2015 Northwest Fisheries Science Center 5-year status report. – February 2018
5. Conduct one-day workshop with National Marine Fisheries Service staff from Ellensburg, Washington, the Middle Columbia River Steelhead Steering Committee, and invited persons. Identify current species status, limiting factors, threats, recovery needs, and focus areas for recovery projects. Evaluate the viability scenarios for each major population group and assess what is needed to get the appropriate populations to the target viability categories. Assess the threats in the context of the five listing factors. Identify what federal agency work has been completed and is currently occurring; and identify what federal actions can most contribute to species recovery for each major population group in the steelhead DPS. – March/April 2018.
6. Conduct one-day workshop with federal and state agency experts to identify a range of potential conservation programs and tools that can be implemented to support ESA recovery; identify potential ways federal agencies can use these tools for Middle Columbia River steelhead to promote recovery (e.g., conservation banks, safe harbor agreements). – June 2018
7. Engage the Federal Caucus communication team to identify and develop recovery stories; and work with local partners to write and distribute stories. – On-going throughout 2018.

8. Write team report: summarize findings, identify recommendations and next steps for Federal Caucus action to promote ESA recovery. – July – August 2018
9. Share draft report and present findings to Federal Caucus; edit and revise final report – September 2018
10. Share report to Federal Executives – October 2018

Products

A report to the Federal Caucus with recommendations for how federal agencies can support ESA recovery and delisting of Middle Columbia River steelhead. Including:

- Using the 2016 NMFS Middle Columbia River steelhead 5-year status review as a reference, together with other information, identify past and current federal programs that are particularly important for recovery;
- Potential future actions that can be taken by federal agencies for each major population group in the DPS;
- A description of a “tool box” of conservation programs that federal agencies could use to promote recovery;
- Recommendations to the Federal Caucus on next steps; and
- 2-3 communication stories about Federal Caucus agency recovery work for Middle Columbia River steelhead: existing programs and potential future actions.

What will success look like?

- A Federal Caucus team successfully implements a one-year project by working with the National Marine Fisheries Service, Middle Columbia River Steelhead Steering Committee, and local state, tribal and federal agency staff to identify the most important remaining limiting factors and where federal agency programs and actions could address these factors to improve steelhead DPS viability toward delisting.