

# Huge effort to aid salmon recovery goes to U.S. District Court

By Shauna McReynolds, spokesperson for the Coalition for Smart Salmon Recovery.

As record numbers of salmon and steelhead return to the Columbia River for the fourth straight year, the debate over salmon protection rages on. After a year of analysis and collaboration, NOAA Fisheries, the agency responsible for protecting threatened salmon and steelhead, has drafted a new biological opinion that incorporates the latest scientific findings and technological innovations. Now it will be up to U.S. District Court Judge James Redden to determine if the plan and its new protections will go forward, or get stuck in court again.

This biological opinion calls for the continued investment of around \$600 million each year — much of it from the pockets of Northwest electricity ratepayers. It is the most extensive — and expensive — effort under

the Endangered Species Act anywhere in the United States.

The revised plan builds on its predecessor and focuses on specific improvements that will make a real difference for fish. There is an increased emphasis on predator control and clearer measures for habitat and hatchery operations. The plan promotes new fish guidance technologies — called removable spillway weirs — that further ease the passage of fish through the system. These “fish slides” reduce the stress on young fish and help keep water quality high. And they have the added benefit of allowing more water to be used for the generation of clean and renewable electricity. With a price tag of around \$20 million each, they represent a substantial and ongoing investment.

Finally, the new plan includes increased emphasis on performance measures to ensure that the significant re-

sources devoted to salmon recovery actually deliver the intended results. Judge Redden wanted more assurance that planned measures were reasonably certain to occur. This biological opinion meets that standard.

These facts notwithstanding, critics of the revised plan accuse NOAA Fisheries, the Bonneville Power Administration, the Corps of Engineers and the Bureau of Reclamation of backtracking. They label improvements at dams as “technofixes” designed primarily to increase electrical generation, despite the irrefutable evidence of their benefit to fish.

So great is the level of cynicism among salmon “advocates” that almost no plan devised by the federal agencies goes unchallenged, either politically or in court. But lawyers and endless law suits don’t save salmon. Doomsday pronouncements don’t help either.

The truth is that the runs have improved to record levels, thanks to the measures already being implemented, in concert with good ocean conditions.

Judge Redden expressed his concerns about the biological opinion and received a response that is both legally and biologically sound. We find ourselves at a pivotal moment on the long, difficult road to salmon recovery. The outstanding salmon runs in the last four years demonstrate that the massive investments made for

salmon recovery are making a difference. Now is not the time to get bogged down in unneeded legal wrangling. An endorsement of the new biological opinion would foster greater cooperation among all parties and, most importantly, provide better results for salmon and for citizens of the Northwest.

For more information about the Coalition for Smart Salmon Recovery, call 503-294-1255 or visit their website at <[www.smarthalmonrecovery.org](http://www.smarthalmonrecovery.org)>.



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*Happy Holidays*

*‘Tis the season to be jolly, so take a few precautions to keep your holidays happy!*



**Don't let that glow in the sky be your home. Play it safe with these precautions. Remember, fire only needs a chance — don't give it one.**

- Keep matches well out of reach of children.
- Be sure your smoke alarm is working properly.
- Don't place your tree near a fireplace or heater.
- Makeshift ladders are the number one cause of injury during the holiday season. Be careful what you stand on.
- Check your Christmas lights for frayed or exposed wires, loose connections or broken sockets before you put them up.
- Make sure your tree is securely anchored in a tree stand and kept well watered.
- Don't use indoor Christmas lights or extension cords outside.
- Don't overload circuits or have too many plugs in one socket.
- Turn off and unplug all Christmas lights, indoors and out, before going to bed.
- Use flame-resistant or non-flammable decorations. If they are not labeled flame-resistant, don't buy them!
- Have a fire extinguisher in your home at all times.



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