ProjectID: 29055
Columbia Cascade Water Rights Acquisition
Department of Ecology

Responses to the ISRP questions

Question: Have more specific watershed assessments been done to guide the initial efforts toward identification and evaluation of site specific water needs?

Response:
Yes. Numerous watershed, sub-watershed and site specific assessments on the relationship between stream flows, water use, and the needs of fish have been completed by federal, state, tribal and local agencies over the last several years. These assessments have been done for most of the critical tributaries and stream reaches in the Columbia Cascade.

Examples of specific watershed assessments that will be used to guide the initial efforts toward identification and evaluation of where and when water is needed to benefit at risk salmonid populations within the subbasins.

- Watershed Analysis, Stream Survey Reports and Biological Assessments completed by the US Forest Service on several tributaries of the Okanogan, Methow, Wenatchee and Entiat subbasins.

- Aquatic Species and Habitat Assessment for the Wenatchee, Entiat, Methow, and Okanogan Watershed completed by the National Marine Fisheries Service in 1998.

- Watershed assessment of the availability of ground and surface water for the Okanogan, Wenatchee, and Entiat subbasins done in 1994 and 1995 by the Washington Department of Ecology.

- Salmon, Steelhead and Bull Trout Habitat Limiting Factors Reports and Maps for the Wenatchee (November 2001), the Methow (July 2000), the Okanogan (Draft prepared by ENTRIX and Golder Associates, Inc November 2001), and the Entiat (July 1999) subbasins done by the Washington State Conservation Commission. The Habitat Limiting Factors Reports provide information, by sub-watershed and stream reaches, on conditions that limit the ability of habitat to fully sustain the population of salmon within the subbasins. A rating of habitat factors by stream or stream reaches is also included for use in prioritizing restoration and protection actions.

- Methow River Basin Plan, 1994; Entiat Valley Watershed Study, Coordinated Resource Management Plan, August 2001; and other assessments and plans developed by local watershed groups.

- Salmon and steelhead production plan prepared by Washington Departments of Fisheries and Wildlife, Confederated Tribes of the Colville Indian Reservation, and the Yakama Nation in 1990 for all subbasins.

Ecology will also use information and data generated by on-going watershed assessments being conducted by local watershed groups, tribes, state and federal agencies in all four subbasins. These assessments are addressing key data gaps on water availability, quality and instream flows. Information from these more comprehensive and sophisticated assessments will improve the ability of Ecology and other entities to identify and evaluate where and when water is needed.

Question 2: How use of the general criteria (greatest benefit for fish, additional benefits, funds from other sources, a broad level support among interested parties, lowest administrative costs to implement, and lowest overall cost within the context of the local marketplace) actually worked when applied to the subbasins already targeted?

Response:
The proposals selected in the Methow, Walla Walla and Yakima subbasins, in 2000 and 2001 were based on:

- Understanding of current stock status and their life history stage (used documented information and state's biologists professional judgment;

- Water conditions in the watershed, sub-watersheds and stream segments, both in terms of historic and actual low flows and flows forecast for spawning and migration (e.g., August to September for spring Chinook spawning);

- Opportunities for acquisition looking at the number of diversions, type of farming in the sub-watersheds, transferability of the water rights, and whether the water, once acquired, can be physically available for use where and when needed;

- Partial funding available from the US Bureau of Reclamation (Yakima), the irrigation districts (e.g., Columbia-Snake irrigators Association), Bonneville Power Administration and Washington Water Trust; and

- Support of local watershed groups, and water users in the areas

A list was established identifying sub-watersheds and stream reaches that have the most immediate need to get water back into them. Purchases and leases in those areas improved flows and water temperatures.

Because the program was new and being piloted, administrative and transactional costs were not considered when evaluating and selecting the proposals. Prices were negotiated based on the type of crop farmed and comparable lease prices to determine reasonable prices. Ecology also drew on the experience of the US Bureau of Reclamation and the Washington Water Trust.

Question 3: How will WDFW incorporate monitoring specifically for these acquisitions in its overall subbasin monitoring efforts?

Response:
A comprehensive Monitoring Strategy that addresses watershed health with an emphasis on salmon recovery is being developed by the state of Washington. The purpose of the strategy is to develop the following recommendations:

1. What should be measured, how often, when and by whom.

2. How to ensure that the trends observed in salmon populations and watershed health are incorporated into the management decisions of state agencies.

3. Ways that government could be organized to help implement the strategy for measuring salmon recovery and watershed health.

The overall subbasin monitoring efforts carried out by the Departments of Ecology and Fish and Wildlife are being considered in the development of the strategy.

The strategy and an action plan for implementation are due December 2002. The recommendations included in the strategy must be based on a goal of fully implementing an enhanced and coordinated monitoring program by June 30, 2007.

As work continues on development of the strategy and action plan Ecology is beginning to design the element of an "implementation monitoring" program, such as defining roles and responsibilities, baseline data and information needed, indicators to measure and the scale to measure, and integrating and coordinating data and information. Specifics of the monitoring plan include:

- Additional continuous stream flow gages and staff gages will be installed and monitored in all four subbasins. Data collected will document stream flows and seasonal variability, provide information about the status and trends of instream flow, document the availability and delivery of water purchased and left instream, and support compliance and enforcement actions.

- Diversions are being metered in all four subbasins, providing information on the instantaneous and total amount of water diverted from the streams.

- The stream flow and water use data will be collected consistent with data protocols established by the Departments of Fish and Wildlife and Ecology, outlined in the following web site: http://www.wa.gov/wdfw/hab/sshiap/dataptcl.htm. The data will be incorporated into the Salmon and Steelhead Habitat Inventory and Assessment Program (SSHIAP), an information system that characterizes freshwater and estuary habitat conditions and distribution of salmonid stocks in Washington.

- In addition, a comprehensive updating and revision of the SaSI (Salmonid Stock Inventory) documents is underway. SaSI is a standardized, uniform approach to identifying and monitoring the status of Washington's salmonid fish stocks.

- Salmonid Stock Inventory (SaSI) stock distribution and status will be incorporated into the SSHIAP system. This will link habitat conditions and stock distribution with productivity modeling efforts (e.g., EDT), which can be used as a basis for prioritizing and for measuring the results of water right acquisition efforts on fish population, pending the Comprehensive Monitoring Strategy and Action Plan.