

News Release

For Release on March 03, 2006

Contacts: Heidi Y. Helwig, Corps (503) 808-4510
Mike Hansen, BPA (503) 230-5131
Amy Gaskill, USFWS (503) 231-6874

Corps operates Bonneville Dam facility to protect fish

Portland, Ore. – On Friday, March 3, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will begin releasing water through its corner collector facility at Bonneville Dam on the Columbia River to protect migrating juvenile salmon.

This is only the second year in which water is released solely through the corner collector for this special operation, said the Corps' John Kranda, project manager for the Columbia River Fish Mitigation Program. The Corner Collector is a multi-million dollar surface bypass route developed by the Corps and the region to move fish safely past Bonneville Dam.

Flows will pass juvenile fall Chinook released upstream from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Spring Creek Hatchery in Washington, 15 miles upstream from the dam. Corner collector flows will be stopped on Wednesday, March 8, or when 95 percent of the fish released travel through the facility and past the dam, whichever occurs first. The vast majority of the fish being released are expected to pass Bonneville Dam during this timeframe and benefit from the operation.

The Corps conducts a special operation each year to protect juvenile fish released from the hatchery. This year, just over about 7.5 million juvenile fall Chinook salmon will be released.

"Trying to maximize survival for Spring Creek releases has been a continuing goal for fishery managers because the Spring Creek stock is one of the largest single stock contributors to the duration and success of Washington and northern Oregon sport and commercial fisheries," said Amy Gaskill, a spokeswoman for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Traditionally, the Corps' spill for fish passage begins in April. The salmon from the Spring Creek Hatchery, however, are released from the hatchery earlier than the upstream threatened and endangered species. The National Marine Fisheries Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the states of Oregon, Washington and Idaho, and the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission request some operation such as the use of the corner collector to help these hatchery fish move past the dam quickly each year. The operation is coordinated with the Bonneville Power Administration.

The corner collector facility works in conjunction with the existing second powerhouse screened juvenile bypass system at Bonneville Dam, which had survival improvements completed in 1999. Together, these non-turbine routes will pass about 90 percent of all juvenile fish at the second powerhouse with an estimated survival rate of greater than 99 percent.

Had the water been spilled through the dam, the Corps would have spilled water at a rate of 50,000 cubic feet per second for five days. “That amount of water equals about 200 megawatts an hour, 24 hours a day for the full five days,” said Mike Hansen with BPA, the agency that markets the hydroelectric power produced by Bonneville Dam. “That’s enough power to serve one-sixth the electrical power needs of a city the size of Seattle. Using current estimates, the cost of that power to Northwest rate-payers would be about \$1.3 million.”

The corner collector facility includes a 2,800-foot long transportation channel, a 500-foot long outfall channel, a plunge pool, and modification of the ice and trash chute to ensure safe fish passage.

The bypass flume begins at the southeastern corner of the powerhouse, where a gate is removed to allow about 5,000 cubic feet per second of water to spill into the chute carrying fish downstream. The fish will re-enter the river just beyond the westernmost tip of Cascades Island, over one-half mile downstream. A plunge pool excavated into the river bottom will permit fish to re-enter the river and avoid injuries that might occur at lower river levels.

Bonneville Lock and Dam, built and operated by the Corps, is located 40 miles east of Portland, Ore., on the Columbia River. The Corps' goal is to provide the maximum possible fish passage protection while fulfilling its obligation to operate Corps projects in a way that will balance all resource needs.

Work to improve passage conditions for migrating juvenile salmon and steelhead is underway at every dam on the river system. The Corps is working with regional partners - government, private and public-to preserve the valuable fish runs on the Columbia and Snake rivers.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 545 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resources offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign and Native American tribal governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.