U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

The Klamath River
Fish Habitat Assessment Program

The Klamath River Basin. Red lines indicate dam locations. Credit: Humboldt State University

Background

The Klamath River flows nearly 300 miles from its headwaters in Oregon to the Pacific Ocean in California and hosts the third largest run of Pacific salmon in the continental United States. Its rivers and tributaries run through the Cascade mountain range, high desert pleateaus, the rugged Klamath Mountains, and a temperate rainforest. Salmon from the Klamath River are central to tribal subsistence fisheries and traditional ceremonies, and support one of the Pacific Coast's most economically important commercial and sport fisheries.

However, due to a legacy of large-scale gold mining, timber harvest, hydroelectric dams, water projects and diversions, flow regulation, and lack of fish passage to critical spawning and rearing habitats, salmon in the Klamath River have experienced a steady decline.

How We Help

In 2001, Congress established the Klamath River Fish Habitat Assessment Program or "Flow Study" to provide a scientific "road map" to help guide the restoration of Klamath River fishes –and not just salmon. Included in restoration targets were all anadromous (those which spend life at sea and spawn in fresh water) fishes, including salmon, steelhead, sturgeon, and lamprey.

Under the Program, the Arcata Fish and Wildlife Office conducts various studies to provide baseline data to help restore Klamath River fish populations. The studies involve examining the relationships between fish habitat and flow regimes, and evaluating conditions that limit survival of anadromous fishes in the Klamath River and its tributaries below Iron Gate Dam.

Arcata FWO's role involves administering funds, implementing collaborative studies, and providing technical assistance to its many partners. Information collected to date are extensive, including water temperature, water quality, instream habitat, fish production, fish population dynamics, instream flow, fish health, and hydrology data.

Partners include state, federal, tribal, local, county (Siskiyou, Del Norte, and Humboldt), and private organizations.

Collecting juvenile Chinook salmon from outmigrant traps on the mainstem Klamath River. Sampled fish are sent to the Service's CA/NV Fish Health Lab where they processed to determine prevalence of infection and severity of disease. Credit: USFWS

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Key Projects

The Arcata FWO continues to conduct the following studies and technical assistance:

- Providing technical support to Tribes and agency partners
- Long-term trend monitoring of mainstem Chinook salmon production
- Monitoring juvenile fish abundance, size, and growth
- Juvenile and adult fish health monitoring
- Water temperature monitoring
- Aquatic habitat inventories and fish habitat use assessments
- Development of decision support tools (eg. Stream Salmonid Simulator, Klamath Basin RBM10 Water Temperature Model)
- Technical analyses of conservation strategies

For More Information

See the Arcata FWO's website for project reports: www.fws.gov/arcata

Each fall, staff navigate the mainstem Klamath River using whitewater rafts to survey the abundance of fall Chinook Salmon carcasses and spawning beds or "redds". These data are used to estimate run size or escapement, as needed to set harvest allocations for the following season. Credit: USFWS

AFWO crew conducting fish disease monitoring, in partnership with Oregon State University. Credit: USFWS

Trapping for juvenile outmigrant salmon in the spring. Credit: USFWS

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