

MCKENZIE RIVER GUIDES ASSOCIATION POSITION PAPER

(Accepted by the membership at the MRGA Annual Meeting
February 2, 2013)

MCKENZIE RIVER HATCHERIES

Position

The McKenzie River Guides Association (MRGA) supports the timely revision of the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife Hatchery Genetic Management Plan (ODFW HGMP) for McKenzie River Spring Chinook Salmon and the timely completion of the related consultation process with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS); MRGA supports no action which would preclude any outcome of the revision/consultation process while it is underway, understanding that any acceptable outcome must contribute to the recovery of Upper Willamette River Spring Chinook and its McKenzie River population, a “genetic legacy population”. MRGA also supports the revisions as needed of the HGMPs for the Upper Willamette Hatchery Rainbow Trout Program and the Upper Willamette River Summer Steelhead Program.

Background

In July 2008 the NMFS completed a consultation with three federal agencies on the impact of 13 dams in the Willamette River Basin on species listed for protection under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) including McKenzie River natural-origin and hatchery-reared spring Chinook salmon. The 2008 Willamette Basin Biological Opinion (BiOp) concluded that proposed actions combined with additional actions in a NMFS Reasonable and Prudent Alternative (RPA) will ensure the recovery of listed species. Additional required actions included improving hatchery practices and facilities. As a first step to improvement, current HGMPs are required which present biologically-based artificial propagation management strategies ensuring the conservation and recovery of listed species including McKenzie River Spring Chinook.

The RPA specifically directs agencies to pursue hatchery reforms to minimize the effect of hatchery fish on natural-origin stocks and to operate hatchery programs according to current HGMPs. Improved collection facilities and continued mass marking of hatchery fish are also called for. Implementation of a fish sorting facility at Leaburg Dam that allows hatchery fish to be separated from upstream natural-origin fish is recommended to reduce hatchery-related risks. Finally, outplanting controls are required to limit genetic risks to natural-origin fish posed by hatchery stock. The January 2009 Hatchery Scientific Review Group (HSRG) recommended that the current McKenzie Spring Chinook Salmon Population and Related Hatchery Programs could be improved by upgrading trapping facilities to collect natural-origin broodstock and manage the composition of natural spawners upstream of Leaburg Dam. The HSRG also recommended that managers continue to implement their “apparently successful” BKD (Biological Kidney Disease) strategies which include culling.

In response to the BiOp, revision of the 2008 ODFW McKenzie River HGMP is nearing completion and will soon be released for public review and written comment (Bruce McIntosh ODFW, Personal communication).

November 6, 2012 the McKenzie Flyfishers (MFF), through the Western Environmental Law Center issued a Notice of Intent to Sue for Violations of the Endangered Species Act. The Notice alleges that the ODFW continues to authorize “illegal take” of wild spring Chinook salmon in the McKenzie River through operations of the McKenzie River Hatchery and the Leaburg Hatchery; further it alleges the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has violated the ESA by failing to consult with the NMFS as to its funding of the hatcheries. The MFF goal in the matter stated by member Bruce Anderson *“is the prompt elimination of ODFW’s hatchery Chinook planting in the McKenzie drainage and ODF&W stopping its taking of wild McKenzie Chinook salmon for brood stock purposes except for those salmon that voluntarily return to the hatchery”*. Early in the week of January 20, 2013, the MRGA was informally invited to enter into a cooperative agreement to join with the MFF in negotiating with the ODFW for the terms of an HGMP that incorporates the MFF goal stated above by Anderson. The invitation was rejected and the MRGA will continue to support ODFW in its effort to complete the HGMP and will review and comment on the draft document at the appropriate time.