

NOAA Fisheries, West Coast Region
Columbia Basin Partnership
Questions and Answers
10-18-15

Why is NOAA Fisheries proposing this Partnership?

Over the next several years, NOAA Fisheries will be making significant fishery management decisions regarding the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and recovery of Columbia River salmon and steelhead. These decisions must consider tribal treaty and trust responsibilities, sustainable fisheries and a broad suite of regional interests. We want to ensure that the decisions reflect regional views regarding salmon and steelhead recovery across the Basin.

What is the product or outcome of this Partnership, and how will it be used?

The purpose of the Columbia Basin Partnership (Partnership) is to lead a science-based, results-driven, transparent, and publicly-embraced effort to establish integrated goals for listed and non-listed Columbia Basin salmon and steelhead that optimally balance long-term conservation and harvest and integrate and support regional and local efforts.

NOAA Fisheries envisions this process to generate quantitative, adult return goals at the species, stock, major populations group, and population levels for both listed and unlisted stocks. The goals would address both conservation and harvest/fishing aspirations, hatchery mitigation goals and others. The process would also consider habitat capacity and climate change.

In addition to enhanced engagement and understanding among members, the outcome of shared goals will be a concise, common definition of success. Numerical adult return goals would allow a means to measure progress, and a clear way to maintain public support for regional efforts. Additionally, chances of achieving success will be enhanced through better coordination and effective use of resources.

While the Columbia Basin Partnership will not result in a regulatory decision or commit any party to a set of activities, it is our sincere hope that the prospect of a common, long-term set of goals for salmon and steelhead would inspire our many partners to integrate efforts and seek efficient ways to achieve common goals.

How does this proposed Partnership fit in with the upcoming consultations regarding the Federal Columbia Basin Power System and US v. Oregon?

The Columbia Basin Partnership is not directly tied to the FCRPS or US v. Oregon consultations.

How does this proposed Partnership fit in with recovery planning? Is this an attempt to raise the standards for recovery?

The Columbia Basin Partnership will provide a valuable framework for recovery planning under the Endangered Species Act and inform implementation of existing recovery plans. ESA Recovery plans identify actions needed to restore threatened and endangered species to the point that they are again self-sustaining elements of their ecosystems and no longer need protection. However, many recovery

plans also identify the need to establish broader goals for these species to address sustainable harvest and fishing.

NOAA Fisheries wants to work with regional partners to establish adult salmon and steelhead goals that integrate long-term conservation through the ESA and harvest/fishing in the Columbia Basin. The goals would include non-listed species, which, in some cases, can take harvest pressures off ESA-listed species.

How is this Partnership different from what's been tried in the past?

- To date, efforts have focused on recovery standards under the Endangered Species Act.
- We also recognize the importance of broader needs (beyond ESA) to address Tribal treaty obligations, provide for sustainable fishing opportunities, and consider the role of non-listed fish.
- Unlike previous efforts, we will look at all existing goals across the Basin to consider how they relate to each other, including goals related to wild and hatchery fish, and try to integrate them where we can.
- In addition, in this new Partnership, stakeholders, as well as sovereigns, would have an active role in shaping and overseeing a regional process.

Who can participate?

States and Tribes will be asked to designate a Partnership representative and an alternate. Stakeholders will be asked to send in Partnership member nominations to represent a broad range of interests and geographies. We anticipate that the entire Partnership group will include about 25 people.

The public is always welcome to attend Partnership meetings as audience members. Meeting materials will be available on the NOAA website. The facilitator will provide an opportunity for public input during meetings. Comments from the public will be limited in time to allow sufficient opportunity to conduct other portions of the agenda. Public outreach and engagement will occur through workshops, open houses and/or other means to provide the public with opportunity to provide input and feedback.

What is the level of commitment of Partnership members?

Partnership members would be expected to participate in meetings with good faith, in an open, transparent, inclusive, and accountable manner.

While the process has not yet been fully defined, we expect quarterly meetings with each one lasting several days.

Will there be funding to support participation in the Partnership?

It is unclear at this time. Funding support may be a topic of discussion among the members.

Will there be additional opportunities for public engagement?

The public is always welcome to attend Partnership meetings as audience members. Meeting materials will be available on the NOAA website. There will be a brief public input opportunity for non-Partnership members during meetings. Public outreach and engagement will also occur through workshops, open houses and/or other means to provide the public with opportunity for providing input and feedback.

How will decisions be made and who will make them?

A smaller Sovereigns Group (a subset of the Columbia Basin Partnership) will work with Partnership members to make decisions to establish operating principles, coordinate the process, establish subcommittees, and develop agenda topics, among other functions. Such decisions will comply with all procedural requirements including the Federal Advisory Committee Act. The Sovereigns Group will be made up of Columbia Basin tribes, states, and federal agencies who hold key roles and responsibilities for salmon recovery and management. This group must provide structure and decision-making for the Columbia Basin Partnership for the process to be successful.

The Partnership will serve as the primary forum 1) for discussion of regional integration and development of shared goals; 2) to provide the sovereigns with an opportunity to engage with a broader stakeholder community to generate such input; 3) to provide input to the Sovereigns' Group on process, substance and policy issues; 4) to serve as the forum to discuss and understand the rationale for disagreements; 5) to integrate efforts across habitat, hatchery, hydro and harvest; 6) to discuss opportunities to exchange, influence, and develop relationships; and 7) to discuss potential Basin-wide issues.

How long do we anticipate it will take to deliver this shared strategy?

We anticipate that it will take two years to establish integrated goals for listed and non-listed Columbia Basin salmon and steelhead, but that will be a question for the Partnership members to address.