



**NOAA
FISHERIES
SERVICE**

Conservation Banking Provides Innovative Model for Salmon and Steelhead Recovery and Habitat Restoration

Restoring habitat for listed fish species is of great importance throughout the Pacific Northwest, but it poses challenges when balanced with the needs of a growing society, such as building roads, bridges, and industry. The key to meeting both objectives is finding ways to limit our human footprint on the habitat that supports fish and wildlife.

An innovative tool, known as conservation banking, is doing just this. Conservation banking allows conservation to be implemented through a market framework, where habitat for listed species is treated as a benefit rather than a liability. This model aspires to more than no net habitat loss, thereby advancing species recovery by increasing the amount and quality of habitat available. By establishing large reserves and enhancing habitat connectivity, conservation banking can reduce piecemeal approaches to conservation and mitigation efforts. Banks can bring together financial resources, planning, monitoring, long-term maintenance, and scientific expertise that is not practical for smaller conservation and mitigation actions. As a result, this new management tool is attractive to landowners and land managers.

What is a conservation bank?

A conservation bank is a parcel of land containing natural resource values. The parcel can have high naturally occurring habitat values, or it can be an area where habitat restoration activities are completed to boost values to a higher level. The parcel is conserved and managed via a conservation easement to protect in perpetuity the land and its natural resources for ESA-listed species. Under the conservation bank, protecting the high-value parcel and its natural resources can be used to offset a negative impact to land parcels located elsewhere.

How does conservation banking protect salmon and steelhead?

Salmon and steelhead swim through the rivers, streams, estuaries, and nearshore marine waters of the Pacific Northwest as they migrate to and from the Pacific Ocean. They travel across broad geographic landscapes, with many species traveling thousands of miles to complete their life cycle. Conservation banking helps protect highly migratory species, like salmon and steelhead, by strategically focusing restoration efforts in targeted areas where habitat protection and creation areas are contiguous, large in scale relative to the many smaller actions that degrade habitat, and that address identified limiting factors and recovery goals in biologically significant areas.

NOAA

Conservation Banking Provides Innovative Model for Salmon and Steelhead Recovery and Habitat Restoration

How does the crediting system work?

One of the more challenging elements of developing a conservation bank is creating a biologically relevant crediting system. Credits are the currency of the bank and represent a unit of measurement for the biological resources that are restored, established, enhanced, or preserved at a bank. The credits represent various conservation values a bank can provide to the target species. In the Northwest, NOAA Fisheries uses the Habitat Equivalency Analysis to quantify credits generated by a conservation bank, as well as debits (impacts) accrued at a project site.

How does NOAA Fisheries intend to apply conservation banking in practice?

The Northwest Region of National Marine Fisheries Service finalized their Conservation Banking Guidance on January 31, 2013. This guidance describes the review, establishment, use and operation of conservation banks and in-lieu arrangements for compensatory mitigation in the Northwest region, and is intended to guide NMFS staff as they review conservation bank projects.

NOAA Fisheries encourages the public (individuals, industries, watershed groups, agencies, etc.) to use the conservation banking model to promote salmon and steelhead recovery. One of the benefits of this model is that it promotes large-scale conservation by consolidating funds from separate, small-scale projects into a focused and targeted restoration effort. Conservation banks are directly applicable to many of NOAA Fisheries' activities under its Endangered Species Act (ESA) and Magnuson Stevens Act (MSA) authorities, including ESA section 7 consultations, ESA section 10(a)(1)(B) permits, ESA section 7(a)(1) responsibilities, and MSA essential fish habitat consultations.

During consultation with NOAA Fisheries, credits can be purchased from a conservation bank to offset unavoidable impacts in a way that would more effectively contribute to recovery than addressing those impacts at the site. While equating impacts with appropriate conservation credits can be challenging, in practice NOAA Fisheries' staff conducts such assessments routinely. Staff biologists do so when analyzing the effects of Federal actions and the amount and extent of take in biological opinions, and when developing measures and conditions that action agencies can apply to minimize the adverse effects of their actions.

