USACE Pinniped Monitoring Program in 2015

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FPOM members suggested that the Corps send out an informational document instead of having a Pinniped Task Group meeting in September of 2014.

The Corps has been exploring the possibility of changing the Pinniped Monitoring Program (PMP) from a near survey type observation study to one of sub-sampling similar to the program used by ODFW at Willamette Falls in 2014. The reason for this change has been the anticipated budget cuts at USACE which would likely cause fewer personnel to work on the PMP. As it turns out, the 2015 budget will be sufficient to continue at least one more year observing as we have in the past 9 years. The only difference is that instead of training and using interns from the Student Conservation Association, we will be hiring seasonal biological technicians. Therefore, data collection in 2015 will be similar to the previous years in which this monitoring program has been conducted (see below).

Plan for USACE Pinniped Data Collection in 2015

1. USACE will conduct its PMP in the same fashion as has been done since 2006. The monitoring will be conducted from early January until the end of May 2015. This data collection uses observers to record pinniped presence and predation from sunrise until sunset at Bonneville Dam five days a week. There is no data collection on weekends and holidays. Linear interpolation is used to estimate for hours (e.g. lunch breaks) and days (e.g. weekends) that are not observed.

2. USACE will not conduct pinniped monitoring October through December 2014. The Corps has conducted pinniped observations during the fall months from 2011 to 2013. The fall months are marked by the presence of approximately 5 to 15 Steller sea lions inhabiting the tailrace of Bonneville Dam. These Stellers are commonly observed consuming fall Chinook, Coho, Steelhead, White Sturgeon, and American Shad. The observations from 2011-2013 were conducted when personnel were available and the data collected was sparse.

3. USACE will contract with USDA Wildlife Services to actively harass pinnipeds in 2015. This dam-based harassment is conducted from March 1 until May 31 and covers 7 days a week for 8 hours each day. The main harassment tools used by USDA are cracker shells and rubber buckshot that are fired from 12 gauge shotguns.