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Proposed federal actions fall short — again — for Idaho's salmon

PORTLAND — Three federal agencies today released their lists of proposed recovery actions for ESA-listed Columbia and Snake Basin — a list that offers little change from the government's previous, illegal plans and will fall short of the actions required to restore Idaho's wild salmon.

An initial look at the proposed list of actions shows that the plan includes increased barging of salmon smolts, a few changes in how the hydrosystem is operated during migration months and greater predator control, but does not consider removal of the four lower Snake River dams.

"After a brief examination of this plan, it's clear that the Bush administration is more concerned with protecting the status quo than protecting the sockeye of Redfish Lake or the Chinook of the Salmon River," said Bill Sedivy, executive director of Idaho Rivers United. "The agencies have done little more in this plan than repackage recovery efforts that have already been tried and have failed.

"This assessment, which took more than two years to develop, offers precious little that is new. Meanwhile, only four sockeye have returned to Redfish Lake this year, Chinook salmon runs were down for the sixth straight year, and communities that depend on salmon continue to suffer," Sedivy added.

A majority of fisheries biologists say that the surest, and probably only way to restore Idaho's wild salmon populations is to remove the four lower Snake River dams in Eastern Washington. Since the Bush Administration came to power in 2000, the federal government has refused to consider dam removal as part of the federal recovery plan.

"This proposal represents more of the same old story from the federal government — it's leading us down a path to extinction that is littered with broken promises and denial of the real problem for Idaho's salmon," Sedivy said.

The release of the federal action plan coincides with low returns and limited fishing seasons in Idaho for 2007. Fewer than 11,000 wild, adult chinook made it past Lower Granite dam this year, forcing fisheries managers to severely limit

fishing in Idaho for hatchery salmon (which are bred for harvest) out of concern that incidental catches might harm wild populations.

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“With adult returns being so low, we can’t afford another failed ‘stay-the-course’ salmon plan from the federal government,” said Gary Lane, owner of Wapiti River Guides in Riggins, Idaho. “My business depends on salmon and steelhead fishing. If the federal government continues with the same ineffective recovery plan, salmon fishing seasons will continue to be down.”

“Scientists know that we need to address the biggest killer of Idaho’s salmon if we’re really going to recover these fish – the four lower Snake River dams in eastern Washington,” said Lane. “These proposed actions won’t work again, and Idaho’s rural riverside communities that depend on salmon will suffer because of it.”

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