

MYTHBUSTERS

FISH AND WILDLIFE MYTHS ABOUT THE NORTHWEST HYDROELECTRIC SYSTEM



The 2008 return of 214,500 sockeye salmon to the Columbia River was the largest return of this stock since 1959.

Myth No. 7
Salmon and steelhead
in the Columbia River
are going extinct.

THE FACTS: A SCIENTIFIC OVERVIEW

◆ Salmon and steelhead counts in the Columbia River are higher now than when fish were first counted at Bonneville Dam in 1938

Since 2000, average fish passage at Bonneville Dam has been more than 1 million fish each year. Fewer than 500,000 fish passed the dam when its construction was complete in 1938. Studies by federal agencies show salmon and steelhead numbers in the Columbia have increased since the 1990s.

◆ Many salmon and steelhead stocks listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) have significantly improved since they were listed in the 1990s

- Snake River sockeye salmon are returning in larger numbers than observed since 1968. The 214,500 sockeye counted in 2008 was the largest return to the Columbia River since 1959.
- Summer chinook salmon have tripled in population since the 1980s, increasing from 20,000 to more than 60,000 in 2000, with an average of 60,900 fish returning each year between 2000 and 2007.
- Snake River fall chinook returns since 2003 have averaged 2,500 fish, which is the interim ESA recovery goal for this stock.

◆ State fish and wildlife agencies forecast larger salmon and steelhead returns in 2009 than observed in 2008

The following 2009 salmon return estimates were summarized in the Columbia River Compact Fact Sheets issued by the states of Oregon and Washington.

- Summer chinook: 24 percent higher than 10-year average.
- Fall chinook: 60 percent higher than 10-year average.
- Sockeye: Two times higher than observed in past the 10 years for Columbia and Snake river returns.
- Coho salmon: Third highest return since record of 1.4 million fish in 1986.

◆ Read more about fish and wildlife myths at www.ruralite.org/mythbusters

Source: Public Power Council, based on research collected from state and federal agencies, universities and the private sector.