



Hello!

As a concerned citizen of the upper Wenatchee area, the Priest Rapids Coordinating Committee* wants to provide you with updated information about the White River and Nason Creek Upper Columbia (UCR) spring Chinook programs occurring in your area.

The White River and Nason Creek UCR spring Chinook programs are being rigorously designed to complement ongoing local recovery efforts. These two programs join six other conservation and harvest augmentation hatchery programs currently being implemented in the Wenatchee Basin.

Why the White River?

White River UCR spring Chinook are an important component of the Wenatchee Basin anadromous fish population. This population of fish has dramatically declined and is within the UCR spring Chinook Evolutionary Significant Unit (ESU) listed as endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Fish resource managers are working diligently to increase the number of White River spring Chinook spawners in the natural environment, while maintaining the spatial and unique genetic diversity of the Wenatchee spring Chinook population. This program's goal is to supplement the White River annually with up to 150,000 spring Chinook smolts.

Requirements for the White River spring Chinook program originally considered development of conventional fish hatchery facilities. However, the Priest Rapids Coordinating Committee listened closely to the concerns of interested citizens through a series of public meetings and monthly working group forums and has dramatically reduced the scope of necessary project components.

Where are the fish now?

As part of a multi-partner hatchery program designed to prevent the extinction of the White River spring Chinook, fish are spawned and reared at the AquaSeed facility in Rochester, WA, and the Little White Salmon National Fish Hatchery in Cook, WA. This multi-partner approach eliminates the need for a full spring Chinook hatchery facility on the White River. However, successful implementation of the White River spring Chinook program, which is intended to support recovery, is dependent on an acclimation/release site with natal river water near the location where adult returns are desired. Conceptual designs for over-winter acclimation to maximize survival after release and limit impacts to environmental resources are currently being developed with input by local citizens. Property in the White River has been purchased and continues to be evaluated. Final site selection for over-winter acclimation has not yet been determined.

In early 2007, an estimated 69,000 White River spring Chinook were acclimated in Lake Wenatchee before their release into the lake at the mouth of the White River. It is anticipated that approximately 140,000 White River spring Chinook juveniles will be acclimated for up to eight weeks prior to their spring 2008 release. Until a permanent location can be secured, alternative sites and methods for acclimating and releasing the fish are being explored.

Ongoing evaluation

An Endangered Species Act Section 10 Permit for the White River program was issued by the National Marine Fisheries Service on April 13, 2007. This three-year permit allows program activities in the short term while a Hatchery and Genetic Management Plan for White River spring Chinook is developed and long-term permits are obtained. The plan will provide full details on the White River spring Chinook program and will be evaluated under the ESA and the National Environmental Policy Act.

*Members of the PRCC and its hatchery and habitat subcommittees include NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service, Colville Confederated Tribes, Yakama Nation, Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife, and Public Utility District No. 2 of Grant County. The PRCC is responsible for oversight and implementation of mitigation measures for operation of the Priest Rapids Project.

The document (view at <http://www.gcpud.org/stewardship/whiteriver.html>) was made available to the public this summer and is scheduled to be formally submitted to the National Marine Fisheries Service in the next few months, which will provide a formal public comment period.

Grant PUD and the Yakama Nation are currently conducting fish monitoring activities in the White River. As part of a monitoring and evaluation program, a rotary screw trap was installed in the White River to determine the number of emigrating juvenile White River spring Chinook. The trap is located downstream of the Sears Creek Bridge and will remain in operation until late fall.

Nason Creek News

Unlike the White River, spring Chinook supplementation is not currently occurring in Nason Creek. Under its requirement, Grant PUD's goal is to supplement Nason Creek annually with up to 250,000 spring Chinook smolts.

Potential incubation, rearing and acclimation sites in the Nason Creek area are being evaluated, including a three-acre parcel currently owned by Grant PUD called the Cascade Gardens property. Preliminary water evaluation at this site shows the property may not meet water quantity requirements for rearing and acclimation facilities. Additional properties are presently being researched for feasibility and water evaluations are ongoing.

Grant PUD and the Yakama Nation are also conducting monitoring activities on Nason Creek using a screw trap similar to the one on the White River. The device is used to monitor multiple fish projects in Nason Creek. As one part of a basin-wide monitoring program developed by the Upper Columbia Regional Technical Team and Upper Columbia Salmon Recovery Board, the Yakama Nation Fisheries Resource Management program began monitoring downstream migration of ESA-listed Upper Columbia River spring Chinook salmon and Upper Columbia River steelhead in Nason Creek. The screw trap is also used to monitor coho in Nason Creek.

A Hatchery and Genetic Management Plan is being developed for the Nason Creek spring Chinook program (view at <http://www.gcpud.org/stewardship/whiteriver.html>) and is scheduled to be formally submitted to the National Marine Fisheries Service in the next few months.

Property needed

Properties appropriate for facilities for the acclimation and release of White River spring Chinook, and possible incubation, rearing, acclimation and release of Nason Creek spring Chinook are still being sought. Property owners interested in sale, lease, or partnering in these programs can contact Grant PUD Lands Specialist Sheryl Dotson at 509-754-5014 or 750-1988.

Get involved

The Priest Rapids Coordinating Committee is committed to guiding the White River and Nason Creek spring Chinook programs in a manner consistent with plans to restore Endangered UCR spring Chinook salmon to those rivers. Public involvement and support are some of the most important aspects of salmon recovery.

A small "working group" of people interested in participating in discussions concerning the White River and Nason Creek spring Chinook supplementation programs was convened in June 2007. The group meets from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. on the days of every other regularly scheduled PRCC Hatchery Subcommittee meetings. For more information on the schedule of these meetings, please visit the Web site at www.gcpud.org/stewardship/whiteriver.html. To sign up as a working group member, contact Denny Rohr at Drohr5@aol.com.

Definitions

Acclimation:

The rearing and imprinting of juvenile fish in the water of a particular stream before their release into that stream. Imprinting increases homing ability and enables returning adults to find that stream.

Incubation:

The act of keeping eggs and alevin in conditions favorable for growth and development.

Supplementation:

The release of hatchery fry and juvenile fish in the natural environment to quickly increase or establish naturally spawning fish populations.