

**SYSTEM OPERATIONAL REQUEST: #2003-5**  
**REVISED\***

*The following State, Federal, and Tribal Salmon Managers have participated in the preparation and support this SOR: U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, National Marine Fisheries Service, Idaho Department of Fish and Game, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Nez Perce Tribe and the Columbia River Inter Tribal Fish Commission.*

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**FROM:** David A. Wills, Chairperson, Salmon Managers

**DATE:** April 1, 2003

**SUBJECT:** Implementation of Snake River Spill Operations and MOP.

**SPECIFICATIONS:**

1. Implement spill at Lower Granite Dam as described in the 2000 Biological Opinion. Begin spill at Lower Granite Dam at 1800 hours on April 3, 2003. Spill will then be phased in at the downriver projects at two-day intervals, initiating spill at Little Goose on April 5, at Lower Monumental on April 7 and at Ice Harbor Dam on April 9. (This two-day implementation interval may be modified pending collection of juvenile passage information at these downriver passage sites.)
2. Implement MOP operations beginning at Lower Granite Pool at MOP+1 on April 3 to coincide with the initiation of spill. MOP operations are then to be implemented sequentially at Little Goose Reservoir on April 4, Lower Monumental Reservoir on April 5 and Ice Harbor Reservoir on April 6.

**JUSTIFICATION:**

Spill is being requested in accordance with the NMFS 2000 Biological Opinion. According to the NMFS 2000 Biological Opinion 9.6.1.3.2 Action 40, "The Corps and BPA shall continue to implement voluntary spill at all three Snake River collector projects when seasonal average flows are projected to meet or exceed 85 kcfs." Further, 9.6.1.4.3 Action 54

specifies that the annual planning dates for spill for Snake River projects detailed in Table 9.6-3 are April 3 to June 20.

Chapter 9.6.1.2.1 explains that when the April final runoff volume at Lower Granite between April and July is 16 Maf the spring flow objective at Lower Granite Dam will be 85 kcfs. The April Early Bird Forecast at Lower Granite (April-July) is 16.9 Maf, which includes recorded precipitation through the 24<sup>th</sup> of March, assumes 100% average precipitation in the future and includes snow. The March Mid-Month Forecast was 16.6 Maf at the same location, over the same period. Precipitation over the first 24 days of March has been 130% of average above the Ice Harbor Dam. Snowpacks have also been generally increasing over the month of March in the Snake River Basin. Because of steadily increasing precipitation, snowpack, and resulting water supply forecasts, it is assumed that the April Final Water Supply Forecast will be well above 16 Maf at Lower Granite and flow objectives will be equal or greater than 85 kcfs. Hence, the Biological Opinion would project average seasonal flows to meet or exceed 85 kcfs, and voluntary spill would be implemented at the Lower Snake River projects.

In the first week of monitoring efforts at Lower Granite Dam, the yearling chinook numbers have increased from 1050 to 2930. The cumulative passage index for yearling chinook at this site is approximately 12,000 fish. This is more than double the average over the last five years and second only to 1999. The wild proportion of the daily catch is approximately 50%. These numbers reflect what is occurring at the upriver sampling sites. At the Whitebird Trap the collection of juvenile chinook yearlings increased sharply, reaching 2,640 fish per day on March 24, 2003. The collection of wild yearling chinook ranged from 13 to 103 per day during the week of March 21 through 27 at the Imnaha Trap, with some higher numbers observed previous to that date (178 on March 19, 2003). Yearling chinook daily catch at the Grande Ronde Trap was significantly higher, ranging from 185 to 1215 daily over a similar time period. All four trap sites have captured small numbers of steelhead since they went into operation this season, but catches are similarly increasing. The steelhead index at Lower Granite Dam has increased from 200 to over 700 in the first week of monitoring activities at this site. All of the passage index data indicates that the spring migration is underway in the Snake River for yearling wild and hatchery chinook and steelhead.

Smolt monitoring data indicates that the juvenile fish migration has begun. This objective of this request is to implement the intent of the fish passage measures in the Biological Opinion, implementing protection when fish passage occurs. CRITFC advocates its own spill pattern and level in its 2003 River Operations Plan but supports this operation as a good start.

In addition to the upriver fish the Lyons Ferry Hatchery has begun releasing chinook from the hatchery (650,000) and the Tucannon River (300,000) release sites. These fish are expected to be passing Lower Monumental and Ice Harbor dams in the next few days. Included in these fish are listed spring chinook from the Tucannon River.

The MOP operations are requested to facilitate the passage of these fish through the Lower Snake River reach. This operation is to provide the fastest travel time possible at the present flows.

\*NOTE: CRITFC is not in support of the MOP+1 operation at Lower Granite and advocates for MOP operations at all the Snake River Dams.