



## **A YEAR AFTER CONDIT DAM BREACHING, NATURAL ORIGIN SALMONIDS SPAWN IN NEW MILES OF UPSTREAM HABITAT**

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One and a half years after the breaching of Condit Dam on southwest Washington's White Salmon River the future appears bright for salmon and other fish stocks restricted for more than 100 years to a relatively short strip of habitat between the hydro project and the confluence with the Columbia River.

The dam, located at river mile 3.3, was breached in the fall of 2011, opening a path for salmon and steelhead to long-blocked habitat upriver.

And the fish are using it.

Last year both Lower Columbia River "tule" fall chinook and "bright" fall chinook nests – called redds – were found in what appears to be improved (because of sediment and gravel movement) habitat downstream of the former dam site as well as upstream of the dam. There were also signs of habitation upstream of steelhead and bull trout, and likely spring chinook salmon.

"Everyone had a mile and a half" area below the dam in which to spawn before the dam was removed, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Rod Engle told participants in a May 14-15 Salmon Recovery Conference in Vancouver, Wash. The conference was hosted by the state's Salmon Recovery Funding Board.

With the newly opened passage, it is believed that coho salmon that venture upstream will have access to 21 additional miles of habitat in the White Salmon and tributaries; steelhead 33 miles; spring chinook 13 miles; and fall chinook 5 miles. Accessibility depends on the particular species' swimming and jumping abilities, and the time of year that they swim upstream to spawn. Some might be able to hurdle natural barriers, such as Husum Falls at river mile 7.8 and others might not.

Wild steelhead and coho and tule fall chinook salmon that might venture into the White Salmon are listed under the Endangered Species Act. And while brights such as the Upper Columbia and Snake River chinook stocks are listed, those found in the White Salmon are not.

"They are not necessarily endemic to the area," Engle said. Strays from upstream likely fueled the establishment of the lower White Salmon bright population.

There have been in the past rare sightings of bull trout, but biologists have determined that no resident population is likely to exist in the drainage. The sightings were probably visitors, likely from Oregon's Hood River, which empties into the Columbia across from the White Salmon. It is believed however that bull trout populations did exist upstream of the dam historically.

Any bull trout that make their home in the White Salmon now would be part of an ESA listed "designated population segment."

An impassable waterfall at river mile 16 has always and will continue to block upstream fish traffic.

The dam was breached on October 26, 2011, and dam removal was completed on September 14, 2012. The former reservoir area was re-vegetated in March of 2013.

“In 2012, one year post-breaching of Condit Dam, high counts of 194 LCR fall Chinook salmon redds and 257 bright fall Chinook salmon redds were recorded during individual spawning ground surveys for both stocks,” according to “Translocation of Lower Columbia River Fall Chinook Salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*) In the Year of Condit Dam Removal and Post-Removal Assessments: 2011 and 2012 Report,” which was produced by the USFWS. The report can be found at:

<http://www.fws.gov/columbiariver/publications/WhiteSalmonRiverReportMarch2013.pdf>

“Redds of both Chinook salmon stocks were documented both upstream and downstream of the former Condit Dam site.”

“Redd distribution of LCR fall Chinook salmon was concentrated in the lower White Salmon River downstream from river mile 2.3 (Former Condit Dam Powerhouse location) to the mouth, with some spawning also occurring in the former Northwestern Reservoir area just downstream of Northwestern Bridge,” the report says. “The uppermost observed LCR fall Chinook salmon redd was at approximately RM 5.7.

“Redd distribution of bright fall Chinook salmon was also concentrated in the lower White Salmon River downstream of river mile 2.3. Additional spawning of bright fall Chinook salmon occurred upstream of the former Condit Dam site and extended up to Husum Falls at river mile 7.8 with small concentrations around river mile 6.0 and 7.4.”

One redd was observed last September above Husum Falls at river mile 10.4 and presumably was the work of a spring chinook salmon. The timing of the redd’s construction and its size (much smaller than most chinook redds), led to that theory.

“This upper watershed location would suggest that the adults that constructed the redd navigated Husum Falls at higher spring/summer flows when it can be likely easily navigated by anadromous salmonids,” the report said.

Biologists last year also spotted what they believed to be steelhead redds in Rattlesnake and Buck creeks, two tributaries to the White Salmon upstream of the former dam and reservoir.

Additional evidence was provided by sport anglers catching hatchery steelhead upstream of Condit Dam, according to Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife creel survey reports.

Also of note was a report from two anglers that had landed a bull trout at river mile 7.3, a location known as Dead Man’s Corner in the town of Husum, Wash. One of the anglers is a

a research fish biologist for the U.S. Geological Survey Laboratory and had in the past worked on several projects involving bull trout as well as brook trout. He estimated the fish was approximately 12-13 inches and thought the coloration indicated it was preparing for spawning. The fish was immediately released.

Of the 118 LCR fall chinook carcasses found along the White Salmon, 93 percent were of

natural origin, as were 71 percent of the 97 bright fall chinook salmon observed carcasses.

Total escapement of LCR fall chinook salmon in 2012 was 755 adults and 1,061 for bright fall chinook salmon.

