



The Enterprise

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WDFW's Dugger Discusses the Impact of Condit Dam Removal on Fish

Story by: Jesse Burkhardt

Last Wednesday (6 Dec) Carl Dugger, retired Regional Habitat Program Manager, Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife, spoke to a crowd of 75 or more in the White Salmon Library meeting room. Referencing his experience protecting fish habitat in the White Salmon system, Carl shared his expectations that salmon and steelhead runs would return shortly after Condit Dam is removed in winter 2008/2009.

He said the tributaries along the White Salmon River will provide invaluable spawning and rearing habitat for Chinook and coho salmon and for steelhead. Above Condit Dam, the White Salmon and its tributaries provide up to 26 miles of spawning and rearing habitat for steelhead and a lesser amount for other anadromous salmonids. The White Salmon contributes approximately 13+ miles above the dam, Buck Creek 2+ miles, Mill Creek, 1+, Rattlesnake Creek 7+ (falls at mile 1.5 is not a total barrier), Indian Creek 1+, (culvert barrier at approximately 1 mile) and Spring Creek < 1/2 mile (before artificial barriers). Carl stressed that the cool water and high summer flow levels make the White Salmon River particularly hospitable to salmonid reproduction. Of particular value are the gravel beds, cool pools, and the 'large woody debris' the system provides. He said that coho will be the greatest beneficiary of dam removal in part because their juveniles favor the many large pools in the White Salmon River system.

'Husum Falls (at 8' high) probably won't stop the Coho and Chinook salmon,' he said. He said that steelhead can pass falls as high as 12 to 14 feet, provided they have a sufficient plunge pool. The ultimate barrier to steelhead on the river is 27' high Big Brother Falls at river mile 16.2.

In commenting on the dam removal process, Carl noted 'Pacificorp will use hydraulic sluices and physical removal of sediment for the first few months after the draining of the reservoir. Still, the reservoir will bleed for months or even years.' This will delay return of the salmon a season or two but not the steelhead. 'The steelhead will spawn the season following dam removal. The salmon may take several years to become fully established' he said. Alluding to the inevitable downside, he noted that downstream from Condit Dam the river has become 'stripped of spawning gravel' and summer migrants find thermal refuge in the large pools left

behind. These, he notes, will be reduced in depth as the dam is removed and normal river sediment flow is restored.

In answering one of the many questions, Carl said that the alleged threat to resident rainbow trout from returning steelhead is uncertain as these coexist elsewhere, as they did in the White Salmon prior to the dam. Bull trout have been documented in the system in the past, but have not been seen since the 1980's. 'Documenting bull trout on the White Salmon is very difficult and sometimes dangerous as it is normally done underwater at night with a floodlight and snorkel.'

Carl's talk was followed by a wrap-up by Brent Foster, Director of Columbia Riverkeepers, who hosted the presentation. Brent stressed the importance of the White Salmon in the Columbia River fishery, since it is one dam away from the ocean. 'Each dam,' he noted, 'removes 10% of ocean-bound juveniles.' He underscored the importance of the White Salmon as a cold water fishery noting that high water temperature is the number one environmental threat to spawning and juvenile salmonids. 'Waiting to remove Condit Dam will reduce our chances of saving the endangered species.' In closing, he thanked the attendees and encouraged them to watch for follow-up presentations that his organization plans on related subjects.

As a representative of the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife, Carl was involved in the settlement agreement with PacifiCorp which also included the National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA), U.S. Forest Service, Washington State Department of Ecology, the U.S. Department of the Interior, the Columbia River Intertribal Fish Commission, the Yakama Nation and 14 environmental groups. Carl retired from the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife in January 2006 after a 30 year career.