

Chelan River Fishery Forum

Westslope Cutthroat Trout Stocking in the Chelan River

Proposal

August 10, 2014

Background

One Biological Objective for the Chelan River is “Presence of 200 fish including various age classes.” (Chelan River Biological Evaluation and Implementation Plan [CRBEIP], Table 7-10). The evaluation timeframe for measuring achievement of the Biological Objective in Table 7-10 of the CRBEIP is as follows:

Years 1-5 will serve as establishment of baseline. If 200 fish not achieved in year 5, then either continue studies for:

- A) 10 years beyond year 5 of New license to allow natural colonization from Lake Chelan; or
- B) 5 years beyond year 5 of New License if no natural colonization is evident and test sample of cutthroat if deemed necessary by CRFF

Snorkel surveys in the upper reaches of the Chelan River (Reaches 1 and 2) have documented few cutthroat trout inhabiting those areas to date. Based on these monitoring results, a concern is few cutthroat trout will emigrate from Lake Chelan into the Chelan River within the 10-year Water Quality Compliance Period. In this event, insufficient data will have been collected to determine measurement of the Biological Objective for cutthroat trout, leaving the Washington Department of Ecology (Ecology) with lack of data with which to make a sound decision regarding water quality standards for the Chelan River.

Following the excerpt above from the CRBEIP, Alternative B) provides the Chelan River Fishery Forum (CRFF) the authority to “test sample of cutthroat if deemed necessary.” A recommendation is to stock cutthroat into Reach 1 as a “test sample of cutthroat” to increase the number of cutthroat in Reaches 1-3 to provide more data for assessing the potential for achieving the 200 fish Biological Objective.

One potential issue that needs to be addressed prior to stocking cutthroat into Reaches 1-3 is securing facilities conducive for rearing cutthroat to “various age classes” as desired for testing presence and habitability of Reaches 1-3 for cutthroat. Chelan PUD staff is working currently with WDFW staff at Chelan Hatchery to evaluate the location(s) best suited for rearing cutthroat to satisfy license requirements. This evaluation will determine the feasibility of implementing the following proposal.

Snorkel surveys in Reaches 1-3 are scheduled for March, August, and November in 2014 and, possibly, in 2015 as part of the Monitoring and Evaluation Program. Intensive, monthly snorkel surveys in Reaches 1-3 are scheduled for 2016. Stocking cutthroat prior to these surveys will provide opportunity to observe cutthroat behavior in the upper Chelan River and determine whether the Biological Objective of 200 fish is achievable.

Proposal

1. Stock cutthroat trout in Reach 1 below the Low Level Outlet
2. Stock cutthroat trout in Reach 1 depending upon runoff volume and potential spill volumes as follows:

Option 1 (No or low spill)

- a. Stock approximately 200 juveniles (age 1+) in April-May if low spill volumes are projected, based on runoff volume, to prevent fish from being physically flushed out of Reaches 1-3 by high spill flows;
- b. Stock approximately 2,000 cutthroat fry in late September/early October when Chelan River water temperatures cool to an compatible level for stocked cutthroat;
- c. Adipose clip all stocked fish to distinguish them from naturally-produced cutthroat; and
- d. Conduct stocking in 2015 to take advantage of monthly snorkel surveys scheduled for 2016 to assess cutthroat presence and residence in Reaches 1-3

Option 2 (High spill)

- a. Stock approximately 2,000 cutthroat fry in late September/early October in 2015 when Chelan River water temperatures cool to an compatible level for stocked cutthroat if high spill volumes are projected to prevent fry from being physically flushed out of Reaches 1-3;
 - b. Stock approximately 200 juveniles (age 1+) in April-May of 2016 if low spill volumes are projected, based on runoff volume, to prevent fish from being physically flushed out of Reaches 1-3 by high spill flows; and
 - c. Conduct stocking in 2015 and 2016 to take advantage of monthly snorkel surveys scheduled for 2016 to assess cutthroat presence and residence in Reaches 1-3
3. Consider stocking fish, likely per Option 2, in 2014 as a “pilot” program if rearing issues can be resolved by that time. Snorkel surveys in Reaches 1-3 scheduled for March, August, and November in 2014 will provide preliminary information to be considered for stocking in 2015.