Spring 2013

NOAA FISHERIES SERVICE

Conservation Banking in the Pacific Northwest

Puget Sound

In June 2008, NOAA Fisheries and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service approved the Blue Heron Slough Conservation Bank within Snohomish County, Washington. It is the first banking site to be established as part of the Puget Sound Salmon, Steelhead and Bull Trout Umbrella Conservation Bank. Initial planning began in 1994 when the Port of Everett recognized the need to secure mitigation properties for future projects. In response, the Port of Everett purchased Biringer Farm, located in the Snohomish River estuary. In 2006, Wildlands - a habitat development and land management company that specialized in developing conservation banks to enhance water quality and protect fish and wildlife - partnered with the Port of Everett to restore and manage the site as a conservation bank because the land, when fully restored, will provide a contiguous piece of highly functioning salmon habitat to support juvenile Chinook salmon and steelhead.

Columbia River Basin

Similar to the activities in Puget Sound, on October 23, 2011, NOAA Fisheries signed an agreement with Wildlands for the development of future conservation banks in the Columbia River Basin, known as the Columbia Basin Salmon & Steelhead Umbrella Conservation Banking Program. The agreement provides the framework for the development of banks to ensure they protect and restore highly valuable habitat for ESA-listed salmon and steelhead.

Under the agreement, NOAA Fisheries will look at the recovery needs of the affected population(s) and determine whether a proposed conservation banking site will address the factors limiting the population's survival and recovery. Once a site is established, NOAA Fisheries and Wildlands will determine the appropriate "service area" or geographic area within which impacts that occur may be compensated (or mitigated) through the use of conservation credits from a site bank. The service area must provide benefits to the same populations that are affected by the adverse action at the non-bank, project site. In addition, the service area must be biologically relevant and based on the conservation needs of the ESA-listed species.

How does conservation banking protect salmon and steelhead?

Salmon and steelhead swim through the rivers, streams, estuaries, and nearshore marine waters of the Pacific Northwest as they migrate to and from the Pacific Ocean. They travel across broad geographic landscapes, with many species traveling thousands of miles to complete their life cycle. Conservation banking helps protect highly migratory species, like salmon and steelhead, by targeting restoration efforts in areas where habitat creation and protection are contiguous, and large in scale relative to the many smaller actions that degrade habitat, and by addressing limiting factors and recovery goals in biologically significant areas.