

Southern Boundary Restoration and Enhancement Fund

Final Report

June 1, 2014 through May 31, 2015



*Washington
Department of*
**FISH and
WILDLIFE**

Submitted by
Fish Program
Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

June 1, 2014 through May 31, 2015
Report for the South Fork Nooksack Chinook Captive Broodstock Implementation

TECHNICAL IMPLEMENTATION DETAILS

Approach: Continue to develop, culture, and implement a captive adult broodstock program using juvenile Chinook recruited from the South Fork of the Nooksack River. This is accomplished by receiving up to 1,000 juvenile fish from the Skookum Creek facility, identifying them as either yearling or sub yearling and placing them in discrete vessels for rearing. Additional work includes passive integrated transponder (PIT) tagging and subsequent transfer of half of the fish to the NOAA facility at Manchester for extended rearing in saltwater, while the other half remains at Kendall Creek Hatchery. During the summer months developing adults are identified for maturation and then transferred to the Skookum Hatchery for spawning. The resultant eggs and fry are then incubated, reared, and released into the South Fork of the Nooksack River in the spring of the following year.

The 12 months of staff funding is to support the increasing burden and complexity of fish culture, DNA sampling, PIT tagging, fish health monitoring, data entry, tracking and enumeration and technical reports associated with the program.

Schedule:

August 2014 – Evaluate developing fish for maturation and transfer candidate adults to Skookum Hatchery. Assist with Manchester facility mature adult transfer to Skookum Hatchery for spawning.

June 1, 2014 to May 31, 2015 – Use of funding to staff Fish Hatchery Specialist 2 position that will support all aspects of fish culture, monitoring and reporting associated with the program.

Accomplishments:

The focus of the work associated with this grant is on the culturing and development of the multiple year classes of juvenile fish from the south fork of the Nooksack River. A total of 5 different brood years of fish are currently rearing in the program as depicted in the chart below.

Provisional Data
South Fork Nooksack Chinook Summary
Captive Brood Program
Juvenile Brood Record
05/31/2015

Group	Kendall	Manchester	Brood Total
Juveniles BY'07	30	5	35
Juveniles BY'08	63	70	133
Juveniles BY'09	33	59	92
Juveniles BY'10	114	107	221
Juveniles BY'11	489	192	681
Totals =	729	433	1,162





The progeny of the South Fork Spring Chinook adults spawned in 2013 were released into the South Fork of the Nooksack in June of 2014. There were a total of approximately 677,000 fish in the group, all of which were coded-wire tagged.

In August 2014, a total of 526 mature fish were transferred to Skookum Creek Hatchery for spawning. 160 males and 142 females were transferred from Kendall Creek Hatchery and 84 males and 140 females from the NOAA Manchester Research Facility.

The total 2014 South Fork Nooksack Spring Chinook egg count was estimated to be approximately 744,000. Final data for 2014 spawning season to be provided by Lummi Tribe.

Background:

The South Fork Nooksack Chinook population is one of the 22 populations in the Threatened Puget Sound Chinook salmon ESU. Currently at critically low abundance, it is one of the two populations in the Georgia Strait biogeographical region that must attain a low extinction risk status before the ESU can be delisted. The Puget Sound TRT acknowledged the short term extinction risk for the population as habitat restoration needed to recover the stock were being implemented and recommended establishing a hatchery-based supplementation, gene bank program to preserve the stock, similar to the successful

Kendall Creek program established to rebuild the North Middle Fork Nooksack Chinook population.

An ad hoc Technical Advisory Team of biologists, fisheries managers, geneticists, pathologists, and hatchery managers representing Lummi Natural Resources, Nooksack Natural Resources, WDFW, NOAA and NWIFC was assembled to provide oversight for the stock preservation effort. The genetic baseline for Chinook stocks in the Nooksack Basin was first reviewed and improved to guide the recovery effort. The initial design included use of a weir in the SF Nooksack River to collect adult fish for broodstock. Adult fish would be held at Skookum Creek Hatchery while stock identity was confirmed, and mature adults would then be spawned under the watchful eye of the geneticists to ensure maximum diversity. A weir installed in 2006 was unsuccessful in collecting any SF Chinook. In 2007, the weir was improved and relocated, and an aggressive program was also implemented to collect adult Chinook throughout the basin. A juvenile Chinook collection program was also initiated as an alternative means to collect broodstock. The result of the 2007 effort was collection of three hundred eggs from a spawned out SF female fertilized by a SF male, SF sperm for cryo-preservation and a small number of SF juveniles. To provide an outline for recovery, a ten-year plan was developed for a revised gene bank and supplementation program, based on captive broodstock based programs successfully implemented for other Chinook stocks at the NOAA Manchester Laboratory and the WDFW Hurd Creek Hatchery. The plan includes a Monitoring and Evaluation Program needed to monitor the effects of the program and its success in meeting recovery objectives.

The initial plan proposed by the Team was based on the assumption that adult capture would provide the brood stock for supplementation for a 200,000 sub-yearling release and initiation of a captive brood program at WDFW Kendall Creek Hatchery (fresh water) and Manchester (sea water), with a small contingency for juvenile capture and weir improvement. Despite the increased efforts to improve adult capture in 2007 and 2008 the results of the program as initially planned were disappointing. In response, in 2009 the SF Nooksack Chinook program was shifted from adult brood stock collection to juvenile collection to develop a captive brood. The transition to a juvenile collection program required revision of the captive brood program, and a change in the supplementation target from 200,000 sub-yearlings per year to the full production from the captive brood of up to 1,000,000 sub-yearlings per year. These changes significantly increased the capital and operating costs from those estimated for the initial adult collection based effort budget, with a 10 fold annual increase to accommodate required DNA stock assignment work, year round juvenile collection crews, and additional spawning and rearing capacity at the captive brood and supplementation rearing facilities.

Key Personnel:

Edward Eleazer, Region 4 Hatchery Operations Manager, has 20 years of WDFW hatchery experience throughout Western Washington. The WDFW lead for the project.

Kevin Clark, Hatchery Specialist 4, has a B.S. in Environmental Science from Western Washington and is qualified to supervise all staff in the appropriate culture of captive brood fish. He has 15 years of experience in fish culture, 5 years as a supervisor at Kendall Creek Hatchery.

Josh Lewis, Fish Hatchery Specialist 3, has an A.D. in fish culture from Bellingham Technical College. He will act as the lead worker responsible for carrying out the day to day activities associated with captive brood program.

Crystal Salmon, Fish Hatchery Specialist 2, has a M.S. in Sustainable Aquaculture from the University of St. Andrews in Scotland. She will be responsible for record keeping, preparing and administering therapeutic treatments, feeding and monitoring the fish, and coordinating transfers and handling events.