

Hatchery Reform: An Update on Implementation

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Congress appropriated funding for the Hatchery Reform Project in 2000 for Puget Sound and Coastal Washington. The HSRG followed with recommendations in 2004. In 2005 Congress and National Marine Fisheries Service funded a similar review for the Columbia River Basin which resulted with a “System-Wide Report on the Columbia River Basin Hatchery” in 2009. A similar review was initiated by Congress for California which started in 2010.

The Hatchery Scientific Review Group (HSRG) provides options and recommendations to help salmon and steelhead hatcheries meet conservation and sustainable harvest goals. The most central aspect of this approach involves genetic management of hatchery broodstocks. The HSRG suggests maximum standards and options for the level of hatchery influence on natural populations and criteria for the level of hatchery influence on natural populations and options or meeting those standards.

Funding is necessary, and has just started to materialize, for hatchery and harvest reform to become a reality. State, federal and tribal agencies have adopted many of the basic principles and recommendations of the HSRG. Many examples of implementation of hatchery and harvest reform are occurring. The Tulalip Tribe and Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) developed broodstock management plans for the Snohomish River Basin which meet HSRG recommended broodstock management criteria. The Colville Tribe has received funding for a new hatchery that will be operated following the principles and guidelines recommended by the HSRG. WDFW is working with commercial gillnetters in the Lower Columbia River to develop gear that can be used to selectively harvest hatchery fish and release wild fish. Hatchery Genetic Management Plans, required under the Endangered Species Act are being written for hatcheries in Washington, Oregon, and Idaho that follow HSRG recommended criteria and standards for broodstock management and levels of hatchery strays on natural spawning grounds.

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