Clackamas River Fish Flow Targets

The Clackamas River is a vital natural resource, serving as a critical water source for fish habitat, drinking water, and hydroelectric power generation. Protecting native fish species particularly threatened and endangered salmon and steelhead requires careful management of river flows, especially during critical life stages like spawning and migration.

Balancing Supply and Demand

For the Clackamas River Water Providers (CRWP), maintaining fish flow targets involves a delicate balance between delivering clean drinking water to over 300,000 people and ensuring healthy instream flows for fish. As population growth drives higher demand, especially during the dry summer and fall months, this balance becomes increasingly challenging.

Fish flow targets are essentially prescribed flow levels needed to support different stages of the fish lifecycle. These targets may vary annually based on factors such as snowpack, rainfall, and ecological conditions but always reflect the river's role in sustaining both human and environmental needs.

Fish Flow Targets for the Clackamas River

These targets are designed to support key life stages, migration, spawning, and rearing for fish species such as Chinook and coho salmon, as well as steelhead. Fish flow targets are also closely linked to water quality and temperature. Adequate flows help keep water cool for our native fish species like bull trout as well as dilute pollutants and maintain healthy ecological conditions.

1. Summer Flow (June – September): 650 cfs

A summer target of **650 cubic feet per second (cfs)** is maintained to support juvenile fish migration during a time when natural flows are low and water use is high. Balancing this target requires careful coordination with water supply and other basin water needs.

2. Fall Flow (September – December): 800 cfs

Fall brings the return of adult salmon to spawn. The flow target increases to **800 cfs** to provide the water depth, temperature, and habitat quality necessary for successful spawning and juvenile fish passage.

Implementing and Adjusting Flow Targets

Flow targets are based on monitoring data, hydrologic conditions, and fish population health. Agencies such as the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and Portland General Electric (PGE) which operates dams along the river collaborate to manage flows and ensure ecological balance.

During drought years or other critical periods, coordinated actions may include the CRWP requesting that PGE release water from Timothy Lake, or activating more aggressive water conservation measures to maintain essential fish flows.

Investing in Fish-Friendly Infrastructure
Stakeholders such as PGE and our local Clackamas River Watershed Council have made substantial investments in:

- Fish ladders and juvenile collection systems
- Habitat restoration projects (e.g., gravel augmentation, riparian shading)

These efforts help support fish health, even when flow levels fluctuate due to seasonal demands. Working together with our basin stakeholders on long-term planning efforts, ensures that water rights, environmental priorities, and community needs are balanced effectively.

Water Conservation: A Key Strategy
Reducing municipal water use is a central strategy for protecting instream flows. Campaigns like CRWP's "Fish On the Run, Irrigation Done!" urge customers to reduce outdoor watering by September 1st, when fall salmon and steelhead runs begin. By reducing withdrawals during sensitive periods, more water remains in the river to support fish migration and habitat.

Maintaining fish flow targets on the Clackamas River reflects a broader commitment to sustainable water management. Through conservation, infrastructure investments, and regional collaboration, the Clackamas River Water Providers strive to protect this critical watershed for both the fish that depend on it and the communities it serves.