

EADM Efficiencies: Programmatic ESA Consultation Documents

Using Programmatic Consultation to Improve Efficiency in Bull Trout Restoration Activities

Overview

The Enterprise Program is working on an Endangered Species Act consultation with the U.S. Forest Service's Northern Region (Region 1) to develop a programmatic biological assessment for restoration activities that would affect bull trout, a federally listed threatened species. This biological assessment would cover activities for western Montana national forests and the Idaho Panhandle National Forest where bull trout are present. Thirteen activities would be covered by the biological assessment, such as fish passage restoration, large wood placement, set-back or removal of berms, levees, and dikes, road decommissioning, channel restoration, livestock control measures, surveys that support aquatic restoration, and bull trout protection.

Ingredients for Success

In order for the consultation process to be successful, it will take cooperation and coordination between the Enterprise Program, Region 1, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Communication is vital to successful coordination, so Enterprise Program fisheries biologist Ray Rivera worked with the Forest Service's regional fisheries biologist Scott Spaulding to coordinate an in-person "kick-off" meeting with all the parties involved.

Region 1 developed a core team, including two fish biologists from national forests, a natural resources staff officer, and two fish biologists from two different Fish and Wildlife Service regions (Region 1 for Idaho and Region 6 for Montana). Regular check-ins were scheduled to discuss the progress of the biological assessment, while weekly conference calls also assisted in maintaining communication and coordination.

Lessons Learned

Programmatic consultation documents existed from other Forest Service regions that covered restoration activities for bull trout and other species (e.g., Region 6). Based on those experiences, we were able to learn what had worked in other areas, and then tailor a document that would be most applicable to Region 1.

The programmatic consultation document helped reduce the time it took to develop environmental documentation for restoration projects and, in turn, helped reduce costs.

Next Steps

We are currently in the drafting stage of the biological assessment. Region 1 has reviewed the first draft developed by the Enterprise Program, and those edits are being incorporated into the second draft of the biological assessment.

The next step is to send the Forest Service draft to the Fish and Wildlife Service offices for review. Upon completion of their review, the final biological assessment will be developed and submitted for formal consultation before the end of fiscal year 2020. It is our hope that the programmatic consultation process will be in effect by summer 2021.



Bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*)

For More Information

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