

Status of McNary Modernization Studies at McNary Dam as of April 29, 2004

Problem

Mark Smith was at McNary Dam on the 29th (Thursday) and noticed dead fish in gatewells of unit 2. Dave Hurson, Brad Eby (Project Biologist), Rosanna Tudor and Rod Woodin (Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife) confirmed what was being seen. We also saw fish being “pinched” on the traveling VBS (test screen) in the A slot of unit 4. WDFW reported that facility sampling that morning estimated fish descaling about 14%, and mortality was 2.5%. Both of these metrics are considered above any “normal” range. At this time, unit 2, 3, 4 and 5 were operating at maximum discharge for McNary Modernization biological testing. Discussions with the Project Biologist led to an immediate lowering of test units to within the 1% operating limit. This decision was made because the operation at maximum discharge was a significantly different action from the previous day, which had a lower estimate of fish descaling. The MCN Modernization study for gatewell fish condition has been temporally postponed while we investigate descaling conditions at the facility. Testing was stopped as a first measure (as coordinated in the study plan) while other possible causes are investigated.

Immediate Action Taken

All turbine units are running within the 1% operations limits. Project staff is determining the need for cleaning debris off trashracks, inspecting gatewells and Vertical Barrier Screen and cleaning screens if required, and inspecting the fish collection facility. District Staff is investigating methods to modify the traveling VBS to reduce potential for fish pinching as observed on the 29th. Coordination with regional fish managers is ongoing.

Recommended Further Action:

Continue operation of all units within 1% limits until 0500, Saturday, May 8th. Smolt monitoring will examine fish passing the facility during this operation on May 1st, May 3rd, May 5th, and May 7th. Smolt monitoring can only be conducted every other day at McNary this year due to study design for the transportation study. From 0500, May 8th to 0500 May 10th, Units 2,3,4 and 5 will be operated at Maximum discharge. Along with normal facility collection, releases of PIT tagged fish will be made in the test units. Examination of fish sampled during this period will occur on the morning of May 9th. If descaling and mortality are similar among these samples, we will recommend continuation of the MCN Modernization studies as designed. If descaling estimates are higher on the 10th than the previous two sampling days, we will consult with regional fish managers regarding continuation/modification of the study design.