



US Army Corps of Engineers®

# Want to know more about **Sea Lions?**



Sea lions have followed salmon up the Columbia River for centuries. In 1805, Lewis and Clark encountered harbor seals, and possibly sea lions, near Celilo Falls, which were located about 13 miles upstream of The Dalles.

As commercial fishing expanded in the lower Columbia River in the late 1800s, concerns about predation on valuable salmon grew. In response, the states of Oregon and Washington created bounty programs that paid hunters for each seal or sea lion killed. The bounty programs were very successful and pinniped numbers declined in the region.

In 1972, Congress passed the Marine Mammal Protection Act, which forbids killing or injuring any marine mammal, including seals and sea lions. Since then, populations have rebounded and pinnipeds are flourishing on the West Coast. The increased numbers have also increased hard feelings by tribal and recreational anglers.

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
California Sea Lions	30	106	101	80	72	69
Steller Sea Lions	0	3	2	4	10	9
Harbor Seals	1	2	2	1	3	2

TABLE 1: Total estimated number of sea lions and seals seen at Bonneville Dam, 2002-2007

Most of the sea lions seen near Bonneville Lock and Dam are males, who follow the migrating salmon up the Columbia River in the spring.

- Spring fish runs help sea lions “bulk up” so they are ready for the mating season.
- Sea lions usually arrive in the winter or early spring and depart in late May for the San Miguel Islands in Southern California, where the female sea lions are waiting.

Year	Estimate of Salmonids Caught	Total Salmonid Passage at Bonneville	% of Salmonid Run Taken by Sea Lions
2002	1,010	284,733	0.4%
2003	2,329	217,185	1.1%
2004	3,533	186,804	1.9%
2005	2,920	82,006	3.4%
2006	3,023	105,063	2.8%
2007	3,859	88,474	4.2%

TABLE 2: Estimated salmonid (salmon and steelhead) catch by sea lions at Bonneville Dam (January 1 - May 31)

The Corps is focused on deterring sea lions from entering the fishways so they do not hinder salmon passage at the dam. Acoustic underwater sound transmitters and sea lion exclusion devices are the tools the Corps has at this time to keep sea lions from entering the fishways.

While the Corps attempts to keep sea lions out of the fish passages, we realize that sea lions have visited the Columbia River during salmon season for a very long time. We can keep them out of the fishways, but keeping them out of the rivers is an issue that must be carefully considered jointly by our federal, local state and tribal partners.

Sea lions are very intelligent and excellent swimmers; trapping and relocating them has not always proved successful – they easily return, often within days or weeks of their removal. It is also important to remember that sea lions have been coming up the Columbia River to hunt salmon and steelhead for centuries. To them Bonneville Dam offers just another place to chase down dinner.

Managing sea lion predation of an endangered species is a long-term issue that must be addressed by everyone involved with the Columbia River and all its elements, whether federal, tribal, state, or local organizations. Only by working together can we find a solution that helps endangered species to survive while allowing sea lions and other pinnipeds to pursue their natural prey much as they did centuries ago.