



## THE COLUMBIA RIVER CHANNEL DEEPENING PROJECT

### **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

#### **Why is maintaining a viable navigation channel important to the Northwest?**

- If the channel is not deepened, the regional economy will wither.
- Close to 1,500 Portland businesses and 40,000 regional jobs depend on seaport activity on the lower Columbia River. Last year, marine activity in the lower Columbia River created \$1.8 billion in personal income.
- \$14 billion in goods flow up and down the Columbia River every year.
- The project is jointly sponsored by the ports of Portland and St. Helens, Oregon, and the ports of Longview, Kalama, Woodland and Vancouver, Washington.

#### **Why did NMFS withdraw their Biological Opinion?**

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) issued a No-Jeopardy Biological Opinion for the Channel Improvement Project in December 1999. US Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) also issued a No-Jeopardy Biological Opinion for terrestrial species in December 1999. NMFS withdrew their Opinion in August 2000, citing new information regarding: impacts of bathymetry (water depths) and flow on estuarine habitat; and resuspension of toxics. USFWS's 1999 Biological Opinion for terrestrial species remained valid. Subsequently, USFWS was given responsibility for the Bull Trout and the Coastal Cutthroat trout.

Because a Biological Opinion which meets ESA requirements must be in place before the project can proceed, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps), USFWS and NMFS began a reconsultation process to resolve issues connected with the project. The result is the Biological Assessment issued in January and the NMFS Biological Opinion and USFWS Conference Opinion released this month (May 2002).

#### **Will the Columbia River channel deepening project impact endangered fish?**

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and the US Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) have issued their "no jeopardy" Biological Opinion, in essence, saying no, the project will not jeopardize endangered fish.

During a six-month public process conducted last year by the Corps, NMFS, USFW and the sponsor ports, an independent scientific panel of nationally known ecosystem experts appointed by Sustainable Ecosystems Institute convened to review the environmental and technical issues associated with the project. The group established the best available science by which the channel deepening project should be measured and that it would have no measurable effect on endangered fish.