

**OFFICIAL COORDINATION REQUEST FOR  
NON-ROUTINE OPERATIONS AND MAINTENANCE**

**COORDINATION TITLE** – 20WVP02 Changes in Chinook releases

**COORDINATION DATE** – 05 December 2019

**PROJECT** – Coast Fork Willamette River Spring Chinook Hatchery Releases

**RESPONSE DATE** – 04 February 2020

**Description of the problem** – ODFW is requesting a change to the liberation location for 45,000 (one pond) spring Chinook smolts raised at Willamette Hatchery and currently scheduled to be released in the Coast Fork Willamette River. In Section 2.9.4 "Terms and Conditions" of the ESA Section 7 Biological Opinion for Upper Willamette hatchery programs, production for the Coast Fork Willamette is identified as 267,000 Chinook salmon smolts. This request to change the release location to Little Fall Creek (Middle Fork Willamette) upstream of Little Fall Creek Falls (at RM12), a tributary of the Middle Fork Willamette River, would still leave 222,000 smolts for release in the lower Coast Fork Willamette.

Little Fall Creek Falls are a natural barrier to upstream fish migration, but in 1986 ODFW, Bonneville Power Administration, Weyerhaeuser and the Willamette National Forest constructed a fish ladder to bypass the falls and allow access for adult anadromous fishes to spawn and rear in the 12.5 miles of quality habitat above the falls. Since 1986, the Willamette National Forest and partners have invested heavily in habitat improvements to the Little Fall Creek upstream from the falls in anticipation of providing spawning and rearing habitat to returning anadromous fish. Adult winter steelhead have been observed spawning upstream of the ladder, however, it remains unclear whether adult spring Chinook can navigate the ladder under current conditions. Returning adult spring Chinook from this proposed smolt release would help fisheries biologists to answer the question of ladder utility for spring Chinook and provide additional opportunity for anglers in the lower Willamette and Middle Fork Willamette spring Chinook fishery.

**Type of change required –**

**Change current stocking location from Coast Fork Willamette River to Little Fall Cr.**

Date	Current Location	Proposed Location	Release Waterbody Code	Number	Lot	Hatchery
Feb-Mar 2020	Coast Fk. Willamette River		0200200000	45,000	22H18	Willamette
Feb-Mar 2020		Little Fall Creek (RM12) Mid Fk. Willamette River	0200311000	45,000	22H18	Willamette
Totals				45,000		

**Impact on facility operation** - This change will require a contract modification. It is not anticipated that this would require additional funding.

**Dates of impacts** – February 2020

**Length of time of the impacts** – This initial MOC set up as a test for spring (late Feb – early Mar) 2020 (adults return 2021-2024) but suggest three years of releases to evaluate the fish ladder

and five years of releases to evaluate the production capacity of Little Fall Creek for spring Chinook (covering the life cycle of Chinook). All releases would be subject to available production of hatchery Chinook at Willamette Hatchery.

#### **Analysis of potential impacts to fish**

1. Access to upstream spawning/rearing habitat could help recover ESA listed spring Chinook in the Middle Fork Willamette River downstream of existing dams.
2. Both fish and anglers may benefit from the wider distribution of smolt releases spreading the returns over a larger area.

#### **Summary statement - expected impacts on the fish/program :**

- 1) **Evaluation of spring Chinook salmon use of the fish ladder at Little Fall Cr. Falls (does it work or does it need repaired/modified?)**
- 2) **Evaluate viability of spring Chinook reproduction in Little Fall Creek above the falls.**
- 3) **Suggest three to five years of smolt releases into Little Fall Creek to account for some of the variability in environmental conditions among years (in the event few fish return from the first release).**
- 4) **Access to upstream spawning/rearing habitat could help recover ESA listed spring Chinook in the Middle Fork Willamette River downstream of existing dams.**
- 5) **Anglers in Little Fall Creek and waters downstream could benefit from the wider distribution of smolt releases (enhanced fishery) with little anticipated impact to the Coast Fork Willamette fishery.**
- 6) **Change of release location from Coast Fork Willamette to Little Fall Creek is a no-cost contract modification.**
- 7) **If it is determined that the ladder needs repair, the Willamette National Forest and ODFW will repair the ladder in coordination with Weyerhaeuser.**

#### **Comments from agencies**

ODFW is supportive of this change in release location to evaluate the efficacy of the fish ladder for adult spring Chinook salmon at Little Fall Cr. Falls.

NOAA has approved the release location change in a letter to ODFW dated December 23, 2019.

#### **Final coordination results**

ODFW will use state funded spring Chinook salmon raised at Leaburg Hatchery for this purpose. The USACE will attempt to address this in the current Willamette Valley Hatcheries NEPA efforts.

Excerpt from WFPOM meeting minutes (200624 WFPOM minutes): “20WVP02 MOC\_CHS CoastFk\_LittleFallCr2020 – Ziller said that there is a lot of angst on the COE’s part due to the process. Ziller was trying to make the least impact biologically to the fish. After discussion with Kruzic, it is more risky to use the Leaburg fish rather than Willamette but he can live with the risk. ODFW is planning on releasing the fish out of Leaburg and into the Little Fall Creek in 2021. Mackey is hoping that the work on the EIS for the Willamette helps with better NEPA coverage for the hatchery program. In the future, issues like this can be addressed faster. This topic can come off the agenda but the COE is still addressing it. Ziller still thinks it is a biological concern but if NOAA gives coverage then Ziller is okay with the operation.”

Excerpt from WFPOM meeting minutes (200527 WFPOM draft minutes): “20WVP02 MOC\_CHS CoastFk\_LittleFallCr2020 (ongoing) – Walker reported that at internal Corps meetings, there is general agreement with this action but the timeframe is in question. Ziller said it is for three years of releases and one has already happened so two more years. The BiOp gives ESA coverage but the NEPA coverage is from the 1980s which is very out of date. Office of Council would like a letter from NOAA to the Corps and ODFW with an update of the HGMP that includes the Little Fall Creek release with the same timeframe as the ODFW proposal and an endpoint that is clearly documented. NOAA went through the NEPA EIS process for the hatchery program for the approval of the HGMP in 2019. Mackey will look into if the Corps can use the NOAA coverage. Kruzic said the 1980 coverage is very outdated. Ziller would be the ODFW contact for the letter.”

Excerpt from WFPOM meeting minutes (200422 WFPOM minutes Final): 20WVP02 MOC\_CHS CoastFk\_LittleFallCr2020 (ongoing) – ODFW did release fish into the Little Fall Creek this year from Leaburg Hatchery. To reduce the amount of straying into the McKenzie, ODFW wants to use fish from Willamette instead of McKenzie for next year. ODFW wants to do this operation for three years to evaluate the fish ladder and the potential for natural production in Little Fall Ck. Reis asked what the decision making process is. Mackey said that this action requires a contract modification and requires an internal discussion. Reis would like to note that ODFW is waiting for the Corps to make a decision. Couture suggested adding it to the option year, as it might be a good time to make the change.

Excerpt from WFPOM meeting minutes (200226 WFPOM FINAL minutes): 20WVP02 MOC\_CHS CoastFk\_LittleFallCr2020 (ongoing) – ODFW will cover this action this year with the anticipation that next year, the Corps will know how to proceed. The fish were scheduled to go in February so ODFW made the switch with Leaburg even though it wasn’t the preferred alternative.

Please email or call with questions or concerns.  
Thank you,

Chris Walker  
NWP Operations Division Fishery Section  
Willamette Fish Operations Coordinator  
503.808.4316  
[Christopher.E.Walker@usace.army.mil](mailto:Christopher.E.Walker@usace.army.mil)

Jeff Ziller  
South Willamette Watershed District Fish Biologist  
Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife  
Office 541-726-3515  
Cell 541-954-0796  
[jeffrey.s.ziller@state.or.us](mailto:jeffrey.s.ziller@state.or.us)