

Well, I just got back from our Advisory groups tour of the Cowlitz Hatcheries (Tuesday). Most of my time was spent at the new remodelled Cowlitz Salmon Hatchery complex. It's a 30 million dollars remodel job that should help in producing healthier hatchery fish down the road.

The tour raised more questions and issues than it did answers, and this will be my opportunity to tell you how I viewed it and what I saw. The tour has enlightened me to form some opinions on some pretty interesting issues that I saw during the tour. First thing that I notice on the way to the hatchery was a guy that belongs to the Cowlitz Tribe coming down the road with huge plastic cart in the back of his truck bed that was loaded with summer run steelhead. Apparently he was coming back from what I understand to be an almost daily event. He was picking up our steelhead just as the food banks are doing and Tuesday is the day that they been picking them up. After talking to a friend of mind who picks up the food bank fish for Morton, he told me that they could only get fish from the hatchery on Tuesdays and that the Tribe was picking up fish 4 to 5 times a week! Why would our WDFW be giving our steelhead to the tribes 4 or 5 times weekly when the Cowlitz Tribe has no rights to our fish? But let's not get stuck on that issue when there are lots more to talk about.

A bigger question comes to mind; why are our WDFW managers forcing these fish out of the river BEFORE they can even be caught by the sport fishermen? Why are they pulling these fish into the ladder when that same fish generates over \$140 dollars from a sport fisher? What's wrong with this picture? These summer run fish that are being force into the hatchery separator could easily be withheld in the main steam of the Cowlitz for sport fishers to catch below the Barrier Dam! It's a choice that our WDFW managers are making...not the fish! The "wild" steelhead runs is pretty much over by June, so why is our WDFW forcing these fish that were specifically reared for the sport fishing up into the hatchery and killing them as "excess" fish? Something is really screwed up here and I for one intend to get some answers! Over the years, WDFW has encourage us to build up the steelhead summer run fishery, and now they are taking away our opportunity to catch them.

I took a few pictures of the new facilities so I will share them with you. This one is a couple of the WDFW guys sending off your steelhead to a waiting fish truck just down below and "out of sight" where they will be dumped into a tanker truck where they will be held without water until they die of suffocation and then dumped from the truck into the food bank carts and off they go! All of this is intentionally hidden from the publics view. If you go there, this "process" is not open for public viewing. I wonder why? All that you (the public) get to see are fish going into a couple 14 inch tubes that appear to be going off to "better places" (the holding ponds). Some of the fish do go there, but right now the vast majority of them are going straight down into some food banks carts!



To me, its nothing but a crime to send these fish off to the food banks and tribes when that same fish produces about \$140 each or more to our local economics if allowed to be caught by the sport fishers. Sport fishers pay dearly for each fish that they catch, and yes, that's another one of my darn fact!

Also, as I walked up the road to the fish collections and sorter facilities, I looked back down towards the Barrier Dam and saw Tacoma's two abatement settling ponds. First thing that came to mind was.....look there a ..."River Snot" brood stock pond! The real name for river snot as referred here is "Didymo" (*Didymosphenia geminata*).



This is an issue that our advisory group will be looking at very closely. One can't but think that these abatement ponds are nothing more than breeding ground for algae growths such as Didymo.

I guess one could say that the "green moss" on one entire abatement pond could be a clue. But it's really too early in the process to say it for sure, so I'll let you all know what our group finds out down the road. Tacoma says that they (the ponds) are doing far more than what the state requires them to do; but then again, our WDFW and WDOE hasn't dealt with "Didymo" problem yet either on the Cowlitz. So we will just have to see how this one plays out. I have heard several people complain that sometimes the waters at the barrier dam turn a bright green color just below the Barrier dam and then it's gone!

Bright green color?

And what did you see in the above picture of the abatement ponds....clues anyone?
One pond is clean ... and the other one is bright green...DA!

Here's something else that is new that makes no sense whatsoever. WDFW has about 800,000 late winter run steelhead "feed fry" that they will likely be killing very soon. These are the same exact genetic stock of late winter runs of steelhead that our WDFW is supposed to be using for recovery efforts both in the in the upper and lower Cowlitz. To say that our WDFW is incompetent would be an understatement if they kill off these valuable fish. I challenge our WDFW "tag team" supporters here to address this useless, and wasteful destruction of these fish that should be used for recovery efforts on the Cowlitz! There are numerous rolls of these fish that WDFW is planning on destroying



And yet, a few of you still wonder why I continue to bad mouth the management of our WDFW... Wake up people!

Here's another "ball breaker" for the wild fish advocates of our forum. During the tour, as I walked up to the top by the fish ladder, I looked back down at the Barrier Dam. I asked the WDFW managers if they had relocated the hatchery smolt release site that used to release the fish into the Cowlitz "above" the electrical barrier at the dam. In the past it was major problem because many of the smolts that were being released had to pass

through the electrical field and were killed or injured. The WDFW manager told the group that when the adults attempt to jump the barrier that the electrical stock is so strong that it actually stops them in the tracks. He told us that was one of the major reasons why they relocated the release pipe below the barrier when they remodeled the salmon hatchery. Well, that sounds great until I asked them a "common sense" question like; Ok, then what happens to all the wild smolts that are release from Mayfield Dam when they pass down over the electrical barrier field? If it was so bad for the hatchery smolts what made it "OK" for the wild ones?

The answer wasa blank look on there faces! I then asked them if they had done any studies to determine what the effects were on these wild fish (the ones that are suppose to be the answer to our recovery efforts), and there answer was..." Uh, no! My follow up question was..."Why not"?

There answer..."Well, we don't know"!

Again, a few of you keep asking me what I have against our WDFW.... It's almost a no brainier! Somehow the words "incompetence" keeps coming to mind.

I have a lot more to say, but for now I'll just let the reader digest what I have said.

Stay tuned!