

Columbia and Snake River Timelines – Selected events

From Selected Events Compiled by John Harrison at the Northwest Power and Conservation Council

- 6 to 16 Million Years Before Present: Huge lava flows create the Columbia Plateau.
- 5 MYBP: “Modern-day” Salmon are believed to have evolved in the ancient Columbia River
- 12 to 15 thousand YBP: More than 40 “Missoula Floods” sweep across the Columbia Region
- 458 Five Chinese monks sail past Japan, Kamchatka, the Aleutians, Alaska and down the northwest coast
- 1648 Russian explorers begin the trade in animal furs in North America
- 1792 Captain Robert Gray “discovers” the Columbia River mouth
- 1805 Lewis and Clark cross the Continental Divide into the upper Lemhi River. Large tribal communities supported themselves with harvest of steelhead, the so-called “white Salmon.”
- 1811 Astor Party founds Astoria.
- 1813 Astoria sold to Northwest Fur Company, is claimed by the British and renamed Fort George.
- 1823 Private fur companies begin to also commercially harvest and pack salmon.
- 1825 Beaver trapping begins to falter from depressed demand and low supply.
- 1827 Hudson Bay Company begins logging in the Fort George region.
- 1838 A Methodist Mission at The Dalles becomes the first non-Indian settlement in the Columbia River Gorge.
- 1843 Oregon Trail begins to see pioneers passing into the region.
- 1855 Treaties are negotiated between several Native American Tribes and the US Government
- 1859 Oregon becomes a state and the first large-scale irrigation project is built on the Walla Walla River.
- 1861 Commercial salmon fishing grew for almost 30 years, with harvest peaking in 1889.
- 1877 First salmon hatchery is founded on the Clackamas River in Oregon.
- 1888 23 dams were built on salmon-producing rivers between 1888 and 1920.
- 1892 A proposal to build a dam on the Columbia River at Grand Coulee is published.
- 1896 Large numbers of very large Columbia River wild steelhead harvested at Celilo Falls, with the average size of about 18 pounds with maximum of at least 42 pounds.
- 1895 Washington builds the first of nearly 20 hatcheries in the lower Columbia between 1895 and 1905.
- 1902 The Reclamation Act passed by Congress
- 1903 Columbia River fishermen begin to switch from spring Chinook to harvesting fall Chinook

- 1915 Peak number of commercial gillnet boat in the lower Columbia at 2,856.
- 1915 Army Corps of Engineers finishes Celilo Canal after 12 years of work.
- 1916 Salmon canneries reach peak production which continues until 1920.
- 1918 Columbia River Compact ratified by Congress.
- 1921 Columbia River salmon harvests begin to decline and do so annually until 1958.
- 1924 Black Canyon Diversion Dam blocks steelhead access to Payette River
- 1926 506 Fish Traps in operation while Oregon outlaws Fish Wheels.
- 1927 Lewiston Dam built and virtually extirpated Chinook salmon on the Clearwater, steelhead survive.
- 1932 Federal Plans call for 8 dams on the Columbia River.
- 1933 Work begins on Bonneville Dam.
- 1940 Bonneville Power Administration is named and Kettle Falls is lost to Grand Coulee.
- 1945 Congress authorizes construction of Lower Snake River Dams
- 1955 Walleye introduced and spread throughout the Columbia.
- 1957 Celilo Falls inundated by The Dalles Dam
- 1959 On Oregon's 100th Birthday, the Oregon Moist Pellet is developed and becomes the standard feed for salmon and steelhead hatcheries throughout the NW.
- 1961 Ice Harbor Dam completed on the Snake River.
- 1963 Harpster Dam on the South Fork Clearwater was removed after years impacting steelhead passage. Over 43,000 wild B-run steelhead enter the Clearwater River.
- 1965 Archeological relics, including the earliest known human bones are flooded by Lower Monumental Dam
- 1967 Hells Canyon Dam, the last of 18 dams in the Snake Basin built in the watershed beginning in 1904, and finishes off of upper Snake River salmon and steelhead, once estimated over 1 million fish.
- 1968 Congress passes the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, designating the famed steelhead reaches on the Middle Fork Salmon and the Middle Fork Clearwater system, including the Selway and Lochsa Rivers.
- 1970 Little Goose Dam is completed on the Snake River.
- 1973 Federal Endangered Species Act passed by Congress
- 1974 Dworshak Dam completed on the North Fork Clearwater River. The so-called "Boldt Decision" regarding Treaty Tribal fishing rights is handed down in Federal Court.
- 1975 Lower Granite Dam is completed on the Snake River.
- 1976 The Magnuson Fishery Conservation Act passes and establishes the Pacific and North Pacific Fishery Management Councils to develop fishery management and harvest plans for salmon.

- 1976 Warm Springs, Umatilla, Yakama and Nez Perc form the Columbia River Intertribal Fish Commission.
- 1976 Congress authorizes the Army Corps to construct six salmon and steelhead hatcheries as mitigation for the losses of salmon, steelhead and habitat caused by the construction of the Lower Snake River dams.
- 1980 Congress passes the Northwest Power Act and the Power and Conservation Council meets in 1981.
- 1986 marks the first year of below-average precipitation that continues until 1994.
- 1988 Snake River coho salmon are declared extinct
- 1990 First ESA petitions to list Snake River sockeye and chinook salmon are filed
- 1990 Total wild Snake River steelhead reach a low and stay depressed for much of the decade
- 1992 Test drawdown at Lower Granite Dam showed increased river velocities with minor impacts.
- 1994 Corps analysis in the System Configuration Study showed only dam breaching would help salmon and steelhead
- 1997 NOAA lists Snake River steelhead as a Threatened Species under the ESA.
- 2000 Over 70,700 wild steelhead pass over Bonneville Dam, 20,575 will steelhead pass Lower Granite Dam.
- 2010 Over 153,250 wild steelhead pass Bonneville Dam, 44,133 wild steelhead will pass Lower Granite Dam.
- 2015 Over 94,400 wild steelhead pass Bonneville, while just over 36,700 wild steelhead pass Lower Granite.
- 2017 Less than 1000 wild B-run steelhead return to Idaho, according to the Idaho Department of Fish and Game. Only 400 of those met the size criteria for B-run fish.
- 2018 IDFG states that this is the lowest return year for steelhead in the Snake and Salmon Rivers since 1978.
- 2018 IDFG believes that the poor 2018 run of hatchery A-run steelhead portends a very poor return of B-run steelhead in 2019.