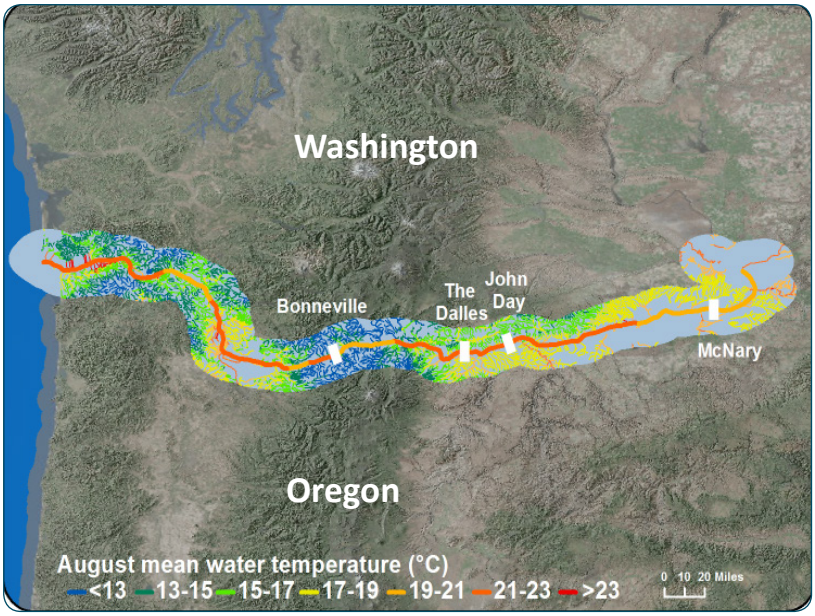
What is the Columbia Cold Water Refuges Project?

Cold Water refuges are areas that are colder than the main river temperature. Salmon use cold water refuges as they migrate up the Columbia River to their spawning grounds. Protecting and restoring these cold water refuges is important for the survival of migrating salmon and the recovery of future salmon populations. The Columbia Cold Water Refuges Project will:

- Identify the cold water refuges currently available for use by migrating salmon.
- Assess the sufficiency of the refuges for current and future populations.
- Identify strategies to restore, enhance, and protect high quality refuges for the future.

The project area is from the mouth of the Columbia River to its confluence with the Snake River (The Washington-Oregon border, at River Mile 310).



Scope of the Columbia River Cold Water Refuges Project
Data courtesy of NorWeST

Project Partners

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is leading the project, working with the States of Oregon and Washington, NOAA Fisheries, tribes, and others.

Plan to be Completed in 2020

Working with our partners, EPA will develop and issue a Columbia River Cold Water Refuges Plan in 2020.

Things to Know about the Columbia Cold Water Refuges Project

- Project work is guided by the most recent science on salmon in the Columbia River.
- The project will implement the State of Oregon's water quality temperature standard. Oregon's standard recognizes that sufficient, well distributed cold water refuges are essential to salmon and steelhead migration.
- The project is connected to climate change. As rivers warm under climate change, cold water refuges will become even more essential to the survival of cold water fisheries, such as salmon and steelhead.

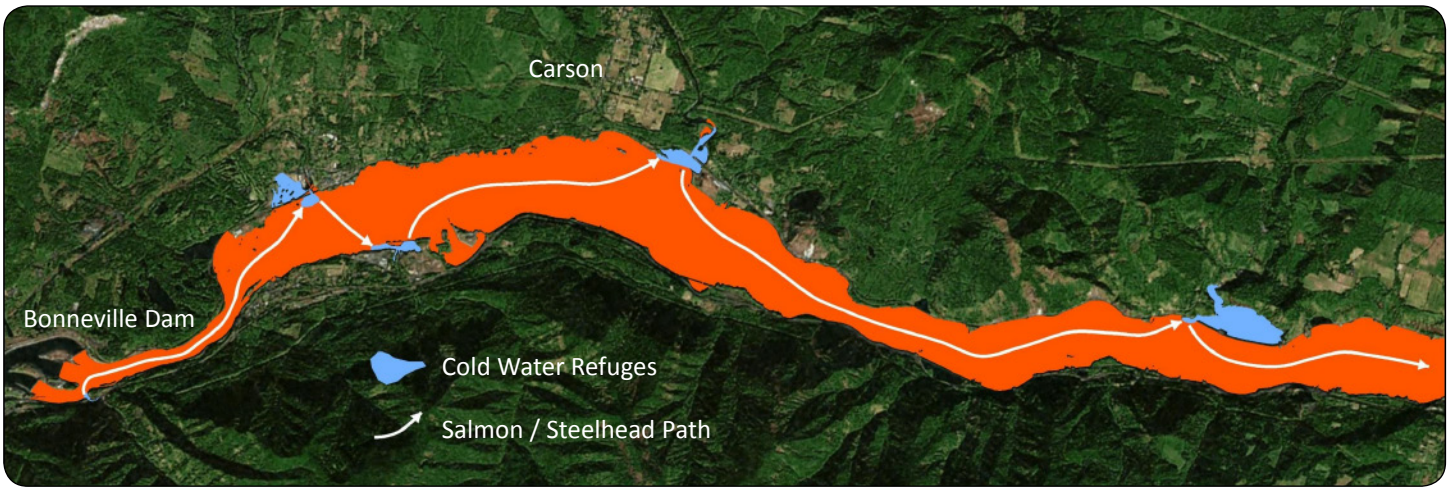


Illustration of potential cold water refuges along the Columbia River Migration Corridor.

What Might the Project Mean?

The project could have future implications for:

- States' (Oregon and Washington) management of activities that affect stream temperature within the watersheds connected to these cold water refuges.
- Increased funding for restoration projects that increase the amount of water providing cold water refuge.
- Protecting fish within cold water refuges.
- Management of the Columbia River, in terms of the overall mainstream river temperature.

For More Information

VISIT: https://www.epa.gov/columbiariver/columbia-river-cold-water-refuges

Regional database and stream temperatures:
https://www.fs.fed.us/rm/boise/AWAE/projects/NorWeST.html

For Information on the Draft Plan:

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