

## **Steigerwald Floodplain Reconnection**

Under the current Biological Opinion from NOAA Fisheries, BPA is responsible for the implementation of the Columbia Estuary Ecosystem Restoration Program (CEERP). The central strategy of the program is to identify, secure, and restore large parcels of estuary habitat on the main stem of the Columbia River, below Bonneville Dam.

This project will reconnect approximately 900 acres of the USFWS owned Steigerwald National Wildlife Refuge to the mainstem Columbia River. The construction activities will be restoring the historic channel network by excavating and re-shaping approximately three miles of tidally influenced channels, allowing fish passage for returning adults to Gibbons Creek, a tributary running through the refuge. To accommodate the Gibbons Creek channel network, existing trails will be rerouted and rebuilt with bridges added to maintain unimpeded access for fish in the channels. An existing parking lot and visitor area will be relocated from the floodplain to behind the new setback levee to provide buffers for the restored Gibbons Creek. These actions will provide juvenile salmon and steelhead rearing opportunities before heading to the ocean.

The metric of success for a CEERP restoration project is the project's number of acres of restored estuary floodplain habitat and the project's proximity to the mainstem Columbia River. Survival Benefit Units (SBU), a measure of the project's biological benefit, are also assigned to each project and are used as an informal tool for BPA Fish & Wildlife to evaluate and prioritize projects. The Expert Regional Technical Group, a collection of 5 senior scientists responsible for reviewing and scoring CEERP restoration projects, have assigned a SBU score of 6.9 Ocean SBUs and 2.4 Stream SBUs to this project, the 2nd largest score designated for a single CEERP project.