

Puget Sound Energy's Baker River Hydroelectric Project

By Arn Thoreen

After six years of bi-monthly meetings and many compromises, the efforts of Puget Sound Energy (PSE) to relicense the Baker River Hydroelectric Project at Concrete has come to fruition. The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) has issued a 50-year license that grants PSE the use of a public resource (water) under the conditions set forth in the Settlement Agreement (the Agreement). Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group was one of 23 stakeholders to negotiate the Agreement with PSE.

The Agreement attempts to mitigate for impacts of the project over the term of the new license. FERC traditionally only looks at project impacts and mitigation within the project boundary, but SFEG argued that the project has impacts downstream and must mitigate for those impacts as well. With the help of the US Forest Service and the Washington Department of Ecology our concerns have been met. The Agreement mandates that PSE study and mitigate for gravel and large woody debris transmission blocked by the project and to provide funding for the enhancement of riparian habitats downstream from the project. A schedule of the annual funding requirements is listed in the Agreement and SFEG will be in a position to utilize those dollars for mutually beneficial projects.