

Removing Dams to Help Fish and People



a salmon leaping in rapids

Have you seen a dam before? A dam is a wall across a stream or river. There are thousands of dams in the United States. They were built for many reasons. In some places, dams were built to make electricity from the flowing water. Some dams were built to help prevent floods in those areas. And in some places, they were built to create reservoirs. Reservoirs are pools of water. They can form when a dam blocks the flow of water in a river. People use the water from reservoirs in their homes.

While some dams were helpful in some ways, many dams also caused problems. In some cases, reservoirs formed over peoples' homes and forced them to move. Also, dams changed the flow of the streams and rivers. The changes hurt local plants and wildlife. Some animals left those areas. Others died off because they couldn't survive the changes. And instead of keeping floods from happening, some dams actually made floods worse.

Some of the reservoirs' deep pools that formed behind dams are a problem, too. The water in the pools can get too warm. Fish and other animals can't live in water that is too warm. Plus, the water gets dirty because the animals that help keep it clean can't live in it anymore.

Many old dams are also causing new problems. Some old dams are falling apart. They need to be fixed or taken down before they break. If they break, people could get hurt.

One of the biggest problems caused by dams is for fish that migrate. Fish that migrate live in

one area, but swim to a different place to lay their eggs. Sometimes, dams prevent fish from getting to where they need to go to lay eggs. If the fish can't lay eggs, they all die out. That hurts all the other animals that depend on the fish for food.

Now, all across the United States, old dams that aren't needed anymore are being removed. That makes the water flow down the streams or rivers in a different way. This helps the fish that need to migrate to lay eggs. The people who remove the dams also help bring back a natural area next to the river. They plant trees, bushes, and other plants along the water. These trees and bushes act like a buffer, or shield. The plant roots hold the soil in place. That stops dirt and pollution from getting into the water. This buffer can also help prevent floods. And it also gives wildlife a place to live.

Helping the streams and rivers flow again helps fish and other animals, and it helps people, too! People can enjoy playing and fishing in the water again.

These conservation efforts are supported by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF), which specializes in bringing together individuals, government agencies, nonprofit organizations, and corporations to restore our nation's fish, wildlife, plants, and habitats for current and future generations.