



NOAA Fisheries Service Southwest Region NEWS RELEASE

501 W. Ocean Blvd, Suite 4200, Long Beach, CA 90802

Contact: Mike Fergus (562) 980-4022/(888) 472-5680 (mike.fergus@noaa.gov)
James Lecky (562) 980-4015/(888) 512-0185 (jim.lecky@noaa.gov)

For Immediate Release
9/9/99
NOAA 99-R150

FISHERIES SERVICE MAKES FINAL DECISION FOR PROTECTION OF CHINOOK SALMON POPULATIONS IN CALIFORNIA, OREGON

The National Marine Fisheries Service has determined that two California chinook salmon populations should be listed as "threatened" for protection under the Endangered Species Act, while deciding that three others do not warrant listing at this time, the Commerce Department's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration announced today. The listings had been deferred since March 1999 so that the agency could gather additional information about the status of the chinook populations.

In making its final conclusions, NOAA Fisheries managers also determined that the Southern Oregon/California coastal Evolutionarily Significant Unit (ESU) was actually two distinct populations, and has divided that ESU into two separate populations consisting of the California Coastal ESU and the Southern Oregon and Northern California ESU. The other ESUs being considered for listing are the Deschutes River summer / fall-run chinook ESU, California Central Valley fall / late fall-run ESU, and the California Central Valley spring-run ESU.

Listed today as threatened are the California Central Valley Spring-Run chinook ESU and the new California Coastal chinook ESU (Redwood Creek in Humboldt County south through the Russian River).

"We now have a better grasp of status of these salmon populations, and can move forward to protect those that need the coverage of the Endangered Species Act," said Terry Garcia, assistant secretary of commerce for oceans and atmosphere and deputy NOAA administrator. "The fish don't care who protects them, as long as the efforts are adequate."

The Central Valley Fall / Late Fall Run population, originally proposed for listing as threatened, is now determined not to warrant listing at this time, but will remain a "candidate" species for reevaluation if new information becomes available warranting review. The Southern Oregon and Northern California ESU also is not being listed under the Endangered Species Act, because the population does not meet the ESA's requirement to be "presently in danger of extinction, nor are they likely to become so in the foreseeable future." The proposed expansion of the Snake River fall-run ESU, which is listed as threatened, to include the Deschutes River population in Oregon has been abandoned. Fishery scientists determined that the population was a distinct population comprising a separate ESU and did not warrant listing at this time.

(More)

(2)

"Today's decisions are based on refinement of existing information and analysis of new genetic data from samples collected by NOAA, the California Department of Fish and Game, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the U.S. Forest Service in 1998 and 1999. The population structure revealed by the new analysis clearly supports these decisions and the redefining of population boundaries," said Jim Lecky, NOAA Fisheries Service SW Region assistant administrator for protected resources.

The Central Valley spring-run ESU, previously slated for an "endangered" status listing, had encouraging salmon returns in 1998 and 1999 in Deer, Mill, and Butte creeks, but not sufficient to remove the entire ESU from being listed. Butte Creek in particular experienced a return in 1998 of 20,000 spawners, but spring-run return populations remain in the hundreds in most streams within the ESU.

Underscoring the agency's guarded approach, Lecky added, "We're encouraged by the increase in abundance in Butte Creek, but are cautious and concerned that the projected return for next year will not be as large. Unfortunately, Butte doesn't reflect the overall population health of the ESU."

Lecky cited the CALFED Bay-Delta program and Central Valley Project Improvement Act as current efforts in place addressing habitat restoration for spring chinook in the central valley. Also identified was the ongoing work with industry and the state and local governments to develop and implement habitat conservation plans for the newly listed coastal chinook populations.

The new listings are not expected to result in any new impacts on landowners or the economy. Both of today's newly listed chinook populations occur in areas already having federally listed salmon with regulatory protection. Additionally, the Central Valley spring chinook population, listed today as threatened, is already listed under the state of California's endangered species act.

Decisions today stemmed not only from new genetic analysis and status of existing hatchery stocks, but a comprehensive status review of West Coast chinook salmon in 1998 that originally identified 15 ESUs. Reviews considered stock abundance, distribution, population trends and risk, as well as existing protection and restoration programs. Generally applied, a threatened status means that a species is likely to become endangered within the foreseeable future. An endangered status means that a species is in danger of extinction throughout all, or a significant portion, of its range.

Factors affecting the health of the fish vary from watershed to watershed, but typically include dam construction and operation, over-harvesting, certain hatchery practices, and land-use and water-development projects that degrade water and river conditions key to salmon survival.

Additional specific information about these decisions, including maps and fact sheets, is available on the NOAA Northwest Region Web site at www.nwr.noaa.gov, and the Southwest Region Web site at <http://swr.ucsd.edu>. The federal register notice containing this proposal is available at the Government Printing Office's Web site at www.gpo.gov.

#

E - 0 0 7 1 7 4

E-007174