



Contact: Rob Jones, (503) 230-5429
Contact: Scott Smullen, (301) 713-2370

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
NOAA 98-R140 August 3, 1998

Fisheries Service Lists Oregon Coho Salmon Under Federal Court Order

The National Marine Fisheries Service said today it would list Oregon coastal coho salmon as “threatened” under the federal Endangered Species Act to conform with a federal district court order signed early in June. The listing affects coastal coho in the state from Cape Blanco north to the Columbia River.

In May 1997, the fisheries service said that protecting Oregon coastal coho under the Endangered Species act was unnecessary, citing harvest and hatchery reforms and commitments to protecting the fish’s habitat under the Oregon Coastal Salmon Restoration Initiative, a comprehensive state-run salmon conservation plan.

Environmental groups challenged this decision. Last June a district court set aside the fishery agency’s decision and ordered the agency to issue a new decision—in essence, requiring an Endangered Species Act listing—by Aug. 3.

Both the fisheries service and the state of Oregon have filed an appeal of this case. The appeal will be taken up by the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco this fall. In the meantime, the federal fisheries agency and the state requested of the Ninth Circuit a stay of the June order, but were turned down Thursday, leading to today’s listing.

“We are steadfast in our commitment to the people and resources of Oregon and we look forward to working with Governor Kitzhaber in implementing the elements of the Oregon plan. Now, more than ever, we’ve got to stay focused on the goal of salmon preservation and habitat restoration,” said Terry Garcia, U.S. Commerce department’s assistant secretary for oceans and atmosphere. “We will continue to explore and develop cooperative efforts with states and regional authorities in order to protect and restore our natural resources.”

William Stelle, head of the fisheries service’s Northwest Regional office in Seattle said, “Certainly June’s court ruling won’t force us to change our fundamental position that steady and effective implementation of the Oregon salmon plan is the right thing to do. It was good for the fish last year and it remains good for the fish today.”

“We look forward to the continuing hard work of the many people who are making this landmark effort a reality, notwithstanding the order of the district court or today’s action,” he added.

Many activities along the south coast of Oregon, where other stocks of coho have been protected under the Endangered Species Act since May 1997, take the place of ESA regulations.

Oregonians there continue to collaborate with federal conservation efforts, the fisheries service said, and it's expected that efforts elsewhere along the coast will be equally successful.

- end -