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**Klamath Mountains Steelhead Among the Region's More Abundant
Federal Protection Won't Be Needed, Fisheries Service Says**

The National Marine Fisheries Service said today a population of steelhead salmon from southern Oregon and Northern California is among the more abundant in the region, making federal protection not needed.

The population, known officially as KMP steelhead (for Klamath Mountains Province), includes summer- and winter-run steelhead from the basins of the Rogue and Klamath rivers.

In 1995, the fisheries service, responding to a 1992 petition, proposed that the fish be listed as "threatened" under the Endangered Species Act. Then in 1998, following a series of scientific reviews, the agency concluded that protection for the population was "not warranted," saying that it would continue to monitor the fish's condition and re-assess it by 2002.

A lawsuit followed, and last October, a U.S. district court set aside the "not warranted" determination and told the fisheries service to reconsider its decision. The October court ruling required the fisheries service to make its final determination by March 31.

"We took the court's charge very seriously," said Donna Darm, acting head of the National Marine Fisheries Service's Northwest Region in Seattle. "We've done an exhaustive job of reevaluating this fish's status, working with biologists from the states, tribes and other federal agencies, and with an array of local fishermen, landowners and conservation groups."

"We know more about this fish now than we possibly could have back in 1998," she added.

The outlook for these fish has improved measurably, and it isn't likely to become endangered in the foreseeable future.

Agency biologists said harmful effects from Oregon hatcheries are much lower than had been previously reported and natural steelhead populations are more widely distributed than had been thought.

Agency biologists also said although solid estimates for the fish's population are still not available, the latest information puts the current population of KMP steelhead at at least 50,000 fish -- and perhaps more than 100,000.

For more information, check the Web at www.nwr.noaa.gov.