

December 17, 2004

Dr. Stan Gregory, Co-Chair  
Dr. Carl Schreck, Co-Chair  
Independent Multidisciplinary Science Team  
Oregon State University  
Department of Forest Science  
321 Richardson Hall  
Corvallis OR 97331-5725

Dear Drs. Gregory and Schreck:

The State of Oregon is engaged in an interagency assessment of the Oregon Plan for Salmon and Watersheds on the Oregon Coast. The review, known as the Oregon Coastal Coho Project, has multiple purposes. The Project's over-arching goal is to develop and implement a conservation and recovery plan for Oregon Coast Coho. In addition, the project will serve as a tool to better understand the impacts of our past and current investments and actions under the Oregon Plan and to develop strategic priorities for future investments and actions. The Project assessment will also be used to inform NOAA Fisheries' final listing determination for Oregon Coast Coho under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA).

The Independent Multidisciplinary Science Team (IMST) has provided valuable feedback on preliminary components of the assessment over the last year. We appreciate your participation to date, and seek your continued involvement and advice as we move through the different phases of the Project.

As an initial step in the Project, the state has focused its assessment on the biological viability analysis and responses to the criteria set out in the Policy to Evaluate Conservation Efforts (PECE) that NOAA Fisheries uses in its ESA listing determination review. The Governor's Office seeks the IMST's review of the scientific analysis of the draft assessment as it relates to viability of coho and the ESA listing determination.

The first part of the draft assessment includes a document that reviews and analyzes available data to develop conclusions about the viability of Oregon Coast Coho relative to the ESA listing determination. A copy of the draft is enclosed. This biological analysis has been led by scientists from the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife and incorporates appropriate technical products from the federal Technical Recovery Team.

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The Governor's Office requests that IMST review the scientific analyses and assumptions concerning the State's draft viability criteria and current status of Oregon Coast Coho as described in the draft biological analysis document.

There are five primary components of the draft biological analysis:

1. Determination of the ESU, strata and population structure;
2. Description of attributes used to define viability and assess fish status;
3. Development of specific criteria for each attribute used to define population viability;
4. Development of specific criteria for strata and ESU viability based on roll-up of population criteria; and,
5. Assessment of current status of coastal coho relative to population, strata and ESU viability criteria based on the key attributes described in (2).

Please review these components and provide feedback on whether the scientific approach and analyses are credible and consistent with accepted scientific standards, and whether the assumptions and uncertainties are reasonable and characterized accurately. Also, please provide any suggestions on ways we can improve our analysis with the available data.

The draft biological analysis document is the first of two documents that together will comprise the full assessment that will be submitted to NOAA Fisheries to inform their final ESA listing decision for Oregon Coast Coho. The second part of the assessment is a review of conservation efforts implemented on the coast under the Oregon Plan. We will seek your review of this document, which the IMST will receive for review in January. We will provide specific guidance for your review of that document at the time it is provided.

As you are aware, the draft assessment of biological status and conservation efforts are framed to focus on the federal ESA listing status decision. It does not at this time address overall Oregon Plan objectives, which go beyond viability toward higher expectations for species and watershed health. The State of Oregon is committed to completing a conservation and recovery plan regardless of the federal ESA listing decision (as per OAR 635-007-0502 through 0509). We consider the draft assessment a substantial first step toward the development of a conservation and recovery plan for the Oregon coast. The recovery plan will include assessment of potential future outcomes based on various alternative management scenarios developed in concert with public stakeholders.

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The State of Oregon is on a tight timeline to submit the assessment document to NOAA Fisheries to inform its final listing decision. With that in mind, please gauge your review so that we will receive your comments by the end of February 2005. If time allows, I encourage an iterative process for this review with state agency staff that developed the draft assessment documents.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Tom Byler, at 503-986-6527, or Ed Bowles, at 503-947-6206.

Sincerely,

Michael Carrier  
Natural Resources Policy Director

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