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NOAA to Hold Public Workshop to Discuss Critical Habitat Designation for the Southern Population of North American Green Sturgeon

NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service will conduct a public workshop in Sacramento, Calif., on October 16, 2008 for the proposed designation of critical habitat for the threatened Southern Distinct Population Segment of North American green sturgeon.

The public workshop will be held at the Federal Building, CALFED Conference Room (5th Floor), 650 Capitol Mall in Sacramento from 9:00 a.m. until approximately 5:00 p.m. Fishery biologists will be on hand to answer questions and receive comments on the areas proposed by NOAA Fisheries as critical habitat.

In April 2006, NOAA's Fisheries Service listed what is known as the southern distinct population segment of North American green sturgeon as threatened under the Endangered Species Act and sought public input to assist in the identification of critical habitat for the species. Subsequent to the listing, NOAA Fisheries Service issued a proposed critical habitat designation on September 8, 2008 and requested public comment.

The Endangered Species Act requires a review of critical habitat for designation whenever a species is listed for protection. A critical habitat designation only applies when federal projects, permits or funding are involved and does not apply to citizens engaged in activities on private land that do not involve a federal agency.

NOAA's Fisheries Service is currently proposing the following areas as critical habitat:

- Coastal U.S. marine waters within 110 meters (361 feet) depth from and including Monterey Bay, Calif., north to Cape Flattery, Wash., including the Strait of Juan de Fuca, to the U.S. border with Canada.
- The Sacramento River, lower Feather River, lower Yuba River, the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta and Suisun, San Pablo and San Francisco bays in California.
- The lower Columbia River estuary.
- Humboldt Bay, Calif.; Coos Bay, Winchester Bay and Yaquina Bay, Ore.; and Willapa Bay and Grays Harbor, Wash.

The areas proposed for designation comprise approximately 325 miles of freshwater river habitat, 1,058 square miles of estuarine habitat, 11,927 square miles of coastal marine habitat and 136 square miles of habitat within the Yolo and Sutter bypasses, part of the Sacramento River Flood Control Project.

While comments will be accepted at the workshop, they may also be submitted as listed below and must be received by 5:00 p.m. (PST) on November 7, 2008 to be considered.

- Electronic: Go to the Federal eRulemaking Portal, <http://www.regulations.gov>, and follow instructions for submitting comments.
- Fax to 562-980-4027 Attn: Melissa Neuman

- Mail: Chief, Protected Resources Division, Southwest Region, NOAA's Fisheries Service, 650 Capitol Mall, Sacramento, CA 95814-4706

The proposed rule and supporting documents can be found at www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr, under "Recent News and Hot Topics."

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