



Questions & Answers on NOAA Fisheries' Final Listing Determinations for 10 Populations of Steelhead (Dec. 23, 2005)

Q: What decision did the agency announce today?

A: Today the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries Service) announced Endangered Species Act (ESA) listing determinations for 10 populations of West Coast steelhead. These findings are part of the agency's commitment, begun in 2002, to update all of its salmon and steelhead listing determinations, consistent with a September 2001 district court's order. Today's final listing determinations include:

- Affirming proposals to list 10 populations of steelhead under the ESA
- Maintaining the existing listing status for 9 of the steelhead populations
- Changing the listing status to threatened for one steelhead population previously listed as endangered.

Questions about West Coast Steelhead Listings

Q: *Oncorhynchus mykiss*, rainbow trout and steelhead – what is the difference?

A: Steelhead is the name commonly applied to the anadromous (sea-going) form of the biological species *Oncorhynchus mykiss* (or *O. mykiss*). *O. mykiss* exhibit one of the most complex suite of life history traits of any species of Pacific salmonid. They can be anadromous (called steelhead) or freshwater residents (often called rainbow or redband trout). Under some circumstances anadromous and resident fish yield offspring of the opposite form. Those that are anadromous can spend as long as seven years in fresh water before going to sea, and then spend as much as three years in salt water before returning to spawn in their natal stream or river. While most salmonids spawn just once and die, *O. mykiss* can spawn in subsequent years.

Q: What is the jurisdictional issue I keep hearing about on *O. mykiss*?

A: The anadromous (sea-going) life form of *O. mykiss* is under the jurisdiction of NOAA Fisheries Service, while the resident form is under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Today's listing action includes only the anadromous form of *O. mykiss*.

Q: The steelhead populations NOAA Fisheries Service is listing are described as distinct population segments, not evolutionarily significant units like in past agency reviews. Why is that?

A: In its June 2004 proposed listing determinations, NOAA Fisheries Service – in keeping with past practice – proposed to apply its evolutionarily significant unit (ESU) policy in delineating

Pacific steelhead species for listing consideration. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service disagreed with this approach. It requested that NOAA Fisheries Service make its listing determinations for steelhead consistent with both services' joint distinct population segment (DPS) policy, as has been done with other species for which the agencies share jurisdiction. Given the shared jurisdiction over *O. mykiss*, NOAA Fisheries Service believes application of the joint DPS policy here is logical, reasonable and appropriate to determine distinct population segments for *O. mykiss*. Use of the ESU policy – originally intended for Pacific salmon – should not be extended to *O. mykiss*, a type of salmonid with characteristics not typically exhibited by other Pacific salmon. Today's listing action includes only the sea-going form of the species.

More information about the status reviews and listing determinations is available at <http://www.nwr.noaa.gov>.