



NOAA

NATIONAL OCEANIC AND
ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE



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**NOAA proposes special designation for reintroduced steelhead salmon
in Oregon's Deschutes River, seeks public comment**
"Experimental" designation would protect landowners from liability

NOAA's Fisheries Service today proposed designating a population of hatchery-raised steelhead salmon in Oregon's Deschutes River as "experimental," which would provide legal protection to anyone who harmed the fish while otherwise acting lawfully.

The agency is also seeking public comment on the proposal, the first such designation for any introduced run of salmon.

The reintroduction of the juvenile fish to the upper Deschutes River in Oregon is intended to help recover Middle Columbia steelhead salmon, which since 1999 have been listed as "threatened" under the Endangered Species Act throughout their 35,000-square-mile historical range. It has been more than 40 years since they have been found in their historic habitat in the upper Deschutes River.

"This special designation will allow ample time for local landowners and municipalities to work with NOAA, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife and watershed councils to develop solid conservation measures for these fish that support recovery of the overall larger population of Middle Columbia steelhead," said Will Stelle, head of the NOAA Fisheries Service's Northwest regional office in Seattle. "The great advantage is that well intended conservation efforts won't risk running afoul of the normal 'take' restrictions of the Endangered Species Act."

The "experimental" designation, which is described in section 10(j) of the Endangered Species Act, would remain in effect for 12 years after the first adult steelhead passed Round Butte Dam near Madras in Jefferson County while returning to spawn. After the period expires, the "experimental" designation would end, and the regulations that apply to Middle Columbia steelhead would also extend to this population. A public notice would be issued before the expiration date.

During the 12 years, the status of the population would be considered "proposed for listing" under the Endangered Species Act.

The juvenile steelhead, reared at the nearby Round Butte Hatchery, will be released in the upper Deschutes River above the Round Butte Dam in central Oregon, in parts of Deschutes, Jefferson and Crook counties. Steelhead from the Round Butte Hatchery have the best chance to adapt to conditions in the upper Deschutes River and its tributaries. During the 12 years, three generations of steelhead are expected to pass over the Round Butte Dam.

Reintroduction of the hatchery-reared fish is part of a broader recovery effort by NOAA, federal and state agencies and other partners. This reintroduction is a condition of a new federal hydropower license for the Pelton Round Butte hydroelectric project on the Deschutes River. Portland General Electric Co. and the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon are the licensees for that project. Hatchery-raised fish are often used to rebuild wild stocks that have been affected by hydroelectric projects.

NOAA Fisheries is seeking public comment on the proposed designation as “experimental” and will issue a final rule after reviewing comments. Comments must be received by July 18 and may be submitted:

- Electronically via the Federal eRulemaking Portal, <http://www.regulations.gov>
- By fax to 503-231-2318, or
- By mail to:
Assistant Regional Administrator, Hydropower Division
Northwest Region, National Marine Fisheries Service
1201 NE Lloyd Blvd, Suite 1100
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