



**NOAA  
FISHERIES**

**WEST  
COAST  
REGION**

**To report illegal or  
suspicious activity  
involving salmon:**

**NOAA Fisheries'  
Santa Rosa Office  
(707) 575-6050**

**You may remain  
anonymous.**

# Questions & Answers: Protecting Ryan Creek's Salmon

## Introduction

NOAA Fisheries is actively coordinating with state and local enforcement agencies as part of a multi-agency task force to identify activities throughout northern California, such as unauthorized water diversions, that are harming endangered and threatened salmon and steelhead, including coho salmon (*Oncorhynchus kisutch*), steelhead (*O. mykiss*), and Chinook salmon (*O. tshawytscha*). These protected fish are listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

## 1. Why is NOAA Fisheries issuing letters to Ryan Creek property owners?

Aquatic habitat destruction resulting from illicit agriculture operations was identified as a significant recovery threat in recovery plans for SONCC coho salmon, Central California Coast (CCC) coho salmon, CCC steelhead, and California Coastal Chinook salmon. Illegal land grading, water diversion, and rodenticide/pesticide application accompanying this agricultural development can all degrade salmon and steelhead habitat in streams located downslope from grow sites.

NOAA Fisheries is responsible for carrying out and enforcing federal Endangered Species Act measures to conserve threatened and endangered species such as salmon, steelhead and sturgeon. Preventing take of individual fish and harm to their habitat is necessary for recovering these species.

## 2. Why is the focus on Ryan Creek?

Ryan Creek is a part of the larger Outlet Creek watershed, which has been identified as a critical area for future recovery of ESA protected fish. Outlet Creek contains one of the few interior populations of Southern Oregon/Northern California Coastal (SONCC) coho salmon, and preserving the genetic diversity and life-history adaptations of those fish is critically important.

## 3. Will letters of this type be expected in the other watersheds?

Yes, we anticipate investigations in other Northern Coast watersheds to follow this year and in future years.



*Adult male Coho photo by Morgan Bond*



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#### **4. How does the ESA define “take” of listed species?**

The ESA defines *take* of a listed species to mean “to harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture or collect, or to attempt to engage in any such conduct,” whereas *harm* is further defined by NOAA Fisheries as “an act which actually kills or injures fish or wildlife. Such an act may include significant habitat modification or degradation that actually kills or injures fish or wildlife by significantly impairing essential behavioral patterns, including breeding, spawning, rearing, migrating, feeding, or sheltering.”

#### **5. I got a letter from NOAA Fisheries. Is any follow-up action required of me?**

No. The NOAA Fisheries letter is an “information only” letter reminding landowners of the need to comply with ESA regulations when activities conducted by those landowners may impact listed species.

#### **6. How can I report illegal activity in my watershed?**

Report any illegal or suspicious activity involving the potential take of salmon, steelhead, green sturgeon or their habitat to the Santa Rosa office of the National Marine Fisheries Service. You may remain anonymous.

Call or write:

**NOAA Fisheries**

**777 Sonoma Ave, Room 325**

**Santa Rosa, CA 95404**

**707-575-6050; Fax 707-578-3435**



*Coho smolt photo by John McMillan*

For more information about these species, what they need to survive and our recovery strategies, go to [www.westcoast.fisheries.noaa.gov/protected\\_species/salmon\\_steelhead/recovery\\_planning\\_and\\_implementation/index.html](http://www.westcoast.fisheries.noaa.gov/protected_species/salmon_steelhead/recovery_planning_and_implementation/index.html)