



NOAA FISHERIES

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NOAA Fisheries to hold workshops on Puget Sound steelhead hatcheries

Given substantial public debate officials seek additional input on steelhead hatchery programs

NOAA Fisheries will hold public workshops this summer to seek input on early-winter steelhead hatchery programs in Puget Sound. The agency wants to ensure that issues and views surrounding long-term conservation of salmon and steelhead in Puget Sound are fully considered.

The workshops will build on public comments NOAA Fisheries received earlier this year on a draft Environmental Assessment reviewing steelhead programs in the Nooksack, Stillaguamish, and Dungeness River basins.

The three hatchery programs are operated by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife to support recreational and tribal harvest. In July 2014, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife and the Jamestown S’Klallam Tribe, Lummi Nation, Nooksack Tribe, Stillaguamish Tribe, and Tulalip Tribes submitted Hatchery and Genetic Management Plans to NOAA Fisheries for the three programs for approval under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

Puget Sound steelhead and Chinook salmon are protected under the ESA, and the agencies and tribes must ensure that the early-winter steelhead hatchery programs do not jeopardize the recovery and survival of these listed species. NOAA Fisheries published its draft review of the programs in March 2015 and received over 2,000 public comments that expressed a wide range of concerns.

NOAA Fisheries will hold the workshops to supplement its ongoing environmental reviews under the ESA and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). NOAA Fisheries will be initiating an Environmental Impact Statement to allow for additional public input and review.

Given the need for further review, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife will release this year’s hatchery steelhead into Washington lakes instead of the Nooksack, Stillaguamish, and Dungeness River basins where they could affect threatened Puget Sound Chinook and steelhead.

“While I am glad that we met our goal of completing a draft Environmental Assessment by April, we have more work to do before these fish can be released into Puget Sound,” said Will Stelle, regional administrator of NOAA Fisheries’ West Coast Region. “We realize this will be frustrating to some. But as much as we’d like to get this done quickly, it’s more important to get it right.”

The workshops will be scheduled shortly and the details announced as soon as they are available. For further details on the review of the Hatchery and Genetic Management Plans for the three steelhead hatchery programs, and to see documents released so far, go to:

http://www.westcoast.fisheries.noaa.gov/hatcheries/salmon_and_steelhead_hatcheries.html