

Steelhead population to be reintroduced to Oregon's Deschutes River Basin

Background

The Deschutes River Basin once supported thriving steelhead runs. In 1964, the completion of Round Butte Dam—the most upstream dam of the three-dam Pelton Round Butte Hydroelectric Project—prevented significant numbers of juvenile steelhead from reaching the Pacific Ocean. With dwindling adult returns, fish passage was abandoned by 1968. This, among other challenges, prevented fish from accessing their historical spawning and rearing habitat and contributed to the decline of Middle Columbia River steelhead. In 1999, NOAA Fisheries listed Middle Columbia River steelhead as threatened under the Endangered Species Act.

Today, efforts are underway to reintroduce steelhead to the basin (sockeye and spring Chinook salmon will also be reintroduced, though these populations are not listed under the Endangered Species Act). Reintroduction efforts are part of a new operating license for the Pelton Round Butte Hydroelectric Project, which included a fish passage requirement and a plan to reintroduce Middle Columbia River steelhead above the project. Portland General Electric and the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs are co-owners of the project, and together they developed solutions to facilitate fish passage. With safe upstream and downstream passage available, reintroducing steelhead will help re-establish a self-sustaining population and contribute to the species' recovery.

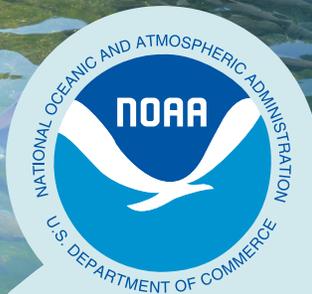
Designating an Experimental Population under the Endangered Species Act

The Endangered Species Act allows NOAA Fisheries to authorize experimental populations. This designation allows local landowners and municipalities to work with NOAA Fisheries, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, and watershed councils to develop conservation measures for these fish while incurring less risk of violating normal Endangered Species Act restrictions. The experimental designation is in effect for 12 years.

Contributing to the Recovery of Middle Columbia River Steelhead

In 2007, NOAA Fisheries adopted a recovery plan for Middle Columbia River steelhead. The plan was developed in partnership with the State of Oregon, tribal co-managers, local governments, and landowners. The successful reintroduction of this species is an important component of the long-term recovery plan and will benefit all who live, work, and play in the Deschutes River Basin.

Environmental Assessment & accompanying documents are available:
www.nwr.noaa.gov/ESA-Salmon-Regulations-Permits/Section-10-Permits/Deschutes.cfm



NOAA
FISHERIES
 Northwest
 Region



For more information contact:
 Scott Carlon, NOAA Fisheries
scott.carlon@noaa.gov
 (503) 231-2379