

Agenda Item Summary

BACKGROUND

Any citizen or group of citizens can, through the Salmon and Trout Enhancement Program (STEP), submit a proposal to the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) to conduct a fish propagation project. Fish propagation is defined by Administrative Rule as a STEP project to rear fish for release.

Authority to review and approve a STEP project proposal has been delegated to the Department by OAR 635-009-0115. However, releases from a STEP fish propagation project may not exceed 100,000 fish of each species reared unless authorized by the Commission after holding a public hearing (OAR 635-009-0135(2)).

The Umpqua Fishermen's Association (UFA), a volunteer, nonprofit organization, has operated a STEP propagation project since 2000, annually releasing up to 100,000 pre-smolt Chinook salmon for fishery rehabilitation and enhancement in the Calapooya Creek area of the Umpqua River basin. The UFA has also released up to 250,000 unfed fry annually as part of this program (unfed fry releases do not require Commission approval).

OAR 635-009-0130 requires a review of STEP propagation programs every five years for Chinook salmon projects. This program was last reviewed in November 2002. In spring 2007, the UFA submitted a new proposal requesting an increase to 300,000 juvenile Chinook salmon released annually, and Fish Division staff have considered this request in conducting the standard review. The program, currently operating under the previous agreement, has been in review for almost one year as details of the modified program have been discussed and the proper permits and access agreements obtained.

Commission authorization is needed for the UFA STEP fish propagation program to annually release more than 100,000 juvenile fall Chinook salmon.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The Department submitted for public review and comment a draft Hatchery and Genetic Management Plan (HGMP) for the South and Mainstem Umpqua River Fall Chinook Program that included the STEP fish propagation projects. The HGMP was submitted to NOAA Fisheries on March 13, 2006.

The public hearing for the UFA STEP propagation project proposal to release more than 100,000 fish occurs at this Commission meeting.

Opportunity for public comment was provided at the July 2007 meeting of the Salmon and Trout Advisory Committee (STAC). Umpqua District staff gave a presentation on the UFA proposal and solicited feedback from STAC members and members of the public who attended. The STAC provided a letter supporting this program (Attachment 6).

COMMISSION AUTHORIZATION FOR THE UMPQUA FISHERMEN'S ASSOCIATION TO ANNUALLY RELEASE MORE THAN 100,000 (UP TO 300,000) JUVENILE FALL CHINOOK SALMON**ANALYSIS**

The goal of this project is to provide additional angling opportunities by releasing up to 300,000 juvenile fall Chinook salmon into the Calapooya watershed of the Umpqua River basin. These fish are expected to contribute to both ocean and freshwater fisheries. The upper portion of the freshwater fishery will be in a section of the Umpqua River that is highly accessible. This project is congruent with the ODFW's "Easy Angling Oregon" program, which promotes fishing on the Umpqua River.

Coded-wire tag (CWT) data from the mainstem South Umpqua River and Cow Creek releases during 1987-1994 suggest a 0.2 percent survival of program fish with a 20 percent ocean harvest and 15 percent freshwater harvest. Newer survival and harvest contribution data will become available from 2007-2009 as data is collected from the CWT-marked fall Chinook salmon released in Calapooya Creek in 2004. This project should produce at least 600 adult fall Chinook salmon and contribute approximately 210 for ocean and freshwater harvest.

This program also provides an excellent opportunity for citizen participation and education. The UFA, the primary group that will implement this proposal, are comprised of citizens from the communities of Sutherlin, Roseburg, Glide, Winston, Myrtle Creek, Canyonville and Glendale. Volunteers associated with the program learn basic fish culture skills and fish management practices while working with ODFW personnel. They also become involved in helping the Department in other ways such as angler education, free fishing days, monitoring/assisting at fish traps, attending public meetings and assisting at fund raising events such as the Umpqua Fishery Enhancement Derby. They advertise their activities in the local newspaper and have general meetings that are open to the public. Members of the UFA annually contribute 4,000-5,000 hours of volunteer time to the Department.

To address conservation concerns, ensure adequate evaluation and maintain consistency with other recent STEP propagation program reviews, staff recommends approving this proposal, with several important conditions, which are also listed in Attachment 2.

First, the Department requests that the UFA increase their mark rate from 25 percent to 75 percent. Potential future management changes to coastal fall Chinook (e.g. mark-selective fisheries) and the increased ability to monitor marked fish dictate this proactive approach. Marking fish at a higher rate will also help STEP programs be more consistent with the Department hatchery programs, which currently mark about 85 percent of fall Chinook salmon released. We recommend using an adipose fin clip as the external mark. Fall Chinook reared by a STEP group in the lower Umpqua basin will use a different mark to distinguish them from UFA fish.

We request that UFA volunteers provide support for increased monitoring and evaluation. Department District staff, primarily the STEP biologist, will coordinate this effort, but we anticipate a need to use volunteers to the greatest extent possible. Monitoring will include (a) spawning ground surveys to determine population trends and distribution of hatchery fish in the major spawning tributaries of the lower basin, and (b) creel surveys to determine the contribution of UFA fish to harvest. The UFA and Umpqua District may be able to use protocols being developed for Coos basin STEP groups as a template for their monitoring and evaluation.

Finally, staff request that unfed fry or other surplus fish not be released into the Umpqua River or any other stream basin. Because they cannot be efficiently marked, their contribution to catch, interactions with other fish and survival cannot be assessed. This requirement is consistent with other recent reviews of STEP propagation programs. We propose surplus fish be used for educational purposes or be released into standing water bodies that have no conservation concerns (with District approval).

The other conditions listed in Attachment 2 are standard for all STEP propagation programs.

Staff will revise the original proposal (Attachment 3) to reflect these conditions, pending Commission approval. Staff comments that contributed to the final staff recommendation are provided in Attachments 4 and 5.

OPTIONS

1. Authorize the Umpqua Fishermen’s Association to annually release more than 100,000 (up to 300,000) juvenile fall Chinook salmon.
2. Do not authorize the Umpqua Fishermen’s Association to annually release more than 100,000 (up to 300,000) juvenile fall Chinook salmon.

**STAFF
RECOMMENDATION**

1. Option 1, with conditions listed in Attachment 2.

DRAFT MOTION	I move to authorize the Umpqua Fishermen’s Association, under the guidance of the Department’s Salmon and Trout Enhancement Program, to annually release more than 100,000 juvenile fall Chinook salmon for fishery enhancement. Annual releases are not to exceed 300,000 fish.
EFFECTIVE DATE	May 1, 2008