

Agenda Item Summary

BACKGROUND

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) has completed development of the *Lower Columbia River Conservation and Recovery Plan for Oregon Populations of Salmon and Steelhead* (Oregon LCR Plan; Attachments 2 and 3) with support and input from a Stakeholder Team, federal and state agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGO's), watershed councils and soil and watershed conservation districts (see Executive Summary Attachment 3). Four species of salmon and steelhead are currently listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) – Lower Columbia River (LCR) steelhead were first listed in 1998 (the listing was reaffirmed in 2006); LCR Chinook were first listed in 1999 (the listing was reaffirmed in 2005); LCR chum were first listed in 1999 (and the listing was reaffirmed in 2005); and LCR coho were listed in 2005. Recovery plans are a federal requirement for all species listed under the ESA. This conservation and recovery plan serves a dual purpose as a component of the bi-state (Oregon and Washington) proposed federal Recovery Plan and a State of Oregon Conservation Plan consistent with requirements of Oregon's Native Fish Conservation Policy (NFCP).

The Oregon LCR Plan has received extensive technical review from National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Fisheries (NOAA Fisheries) scientists and the Independent Multidisciplinary Science Team (IMST), and has been reviewed by the Lower Columbia Stakeholder Team and the general public. The Oregon LCR Plan is being presented to the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission (Commission) at the June 3-4, 2010 Commission meeting as an informational briefing, and to solicit Commission input on the Oregon LCR Plan. The Oregon LCR Plan will be presented to the Commission for approval at the August 6, 2010 Commission meeting. Once approved, the Department and other implementers will proceed with directed implementation and the Commission-approved Oregon LCR Plan will be present to NOAA Fisheries for inclusion in the Federal Recovery Plan. The ESU-wide Federal Recovery Plan is planned to be released in early 2011 for a public comment period, with final approval expected in the fall of 2011.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

A 26-member Stakeholder Team was recruited to help the State of Oregon develop the Oregon LCR Plan. Representatives from agriculture, commerce, conservation/recreation groups, federal land managers, fishing groups, forestry, local governments, ports, soil and water conservation districts, wastewater, utilities and watershed councils were on the Team and provided their input throughout the development of the Oregon LCR Plan, which began in March 2006. Over the intervening years, the Stakeholders provided comments on three drafts of the Oregon LCR Plan and unanimously recommended that it move forward for Commission review and approval at their February 2010 meeting. Other groups were also convened to help develop the Oregon LCR Plan. These included an Expert Panel, which identified limiting factors and threats for each

population and a Planning Team, which helped develop, refine, and review technical aspects of the plan.

In addition to reviews by the Stakeholder Team, drafts of the Oregon LCR Plan were reviewed by the Planning Team, NOAA Fisheries staff in both the Northwest Region and the Northwest Fisheries Science Center, the IMST (note: the IMST provided comments though no formal recommendations for modifications), and the Department's regional, inter-jurisdictional (Columbia River/Ocean), and Conservation and Recovery staff. The Oregon LCR Plan was revised after consideration of all reviewers' comments.

The current public draft of the Oregon LCR Plan was posted on the Department's website

(http://www.dfw.state.or.us/fish/CRP/lower_columbia_plan.asp) on April 19, 2010 for 45 days of public review and comment prior to the June 2010 Commission meeting. In addition, four public open house meetings were held in Hood River (April 27), Portland (April 29), St. Helens (May 6) and Astoria (May 11) to describe the Plan, allow for public comment and seek public participation in implementing The Oregon LCR Plan. A brochure (Attachment 4), frequently asked questions document (Attachment 5), posters, and a presentation were developed to aid in outreach for and understanding of the Oregon LCR Plan at the public open houses and other informational presentations. A news release announced the web posting of the Oregon LCR Plan, the four public open house meetings, and avenues for providing comments (<http://www.dfw.state.or.us/news/2010/april/041910.asp>).

Prior to the public open houses, the Governor's Natural Resources Office (GNRO) notified state legislators, mayors, and county commissioners about the Oregon LCR Plan's release and opportunities for public input and direct briefings (upon request). The GNRO also presented the Oregon LCR Plan to all of the state's natural resource agency directors in late April. Groups represented on the Stakeholder Team were offered briefings by the GNRO and the Department, and these were held for several entities, including Metro, multiple watershed councils, and conservation interests.

Public review and comment on the Oregon LCR Plan will be accepted prior to, and during, the June 3-4, 2010 Commission meeting, when the Oregon LCR Plan will be presented to the Commission as an informational item. Public review and comment on the Oregon LCR Plan will also be accepted prior to, and during, the August 6, 2010 Commission meeting, when the Oregon LCR Plan will be presented to the Commission for final approval as a state conservation plan.

Once approved by the Commission, the Oregon LCR Plan will be submitted to NOAA Fisheries for inclusion in the ESU-wide federal recovery plan. As part of approval for that plan, there will be a 60-90 day public comment period in early 2011.

ANALYSIS

Prior to the arrival of Europeans it is estimated that more than a million salmon and steelhead returned to spawn in Oregon's rivers and streams in the lower Columbia River. Over the course of the last two centuries, the combined effects of fish harvest, hatchery fish, hydropower, and habitat alterations have led to drastic declines in these populations. The pattern of declining abundance and range reductions provided scientific evidence that supported the listing of most populations of lower Columbia River salmon and steelhead under the federal ESA.

The Oregon LCR Plan spans the area from Youngs Bay at the mouth of the Columbia River, upstream to Hood River above Bonneville Dam. The Oregon LCR Plan addresses legal requirements for recovery planning under the ESA, as well as conservation plan development under Oregon's Native Fish Conservation Policy. It provides an informed, strategic approach to recovery that is based on science, supported by stakeholders, builds on existing efforts and proposes new actions to achieve recovery. The Oregon LCR Plan is the product of a collaborative process led by the Department, with extensive participation by the GNRO, NOAA Fisheries, and the Oregon Lower Columbia River Stakeholder Team. In addition to the cooperative efforts of those entities, the plan has benefited from the involvement of a number of other state, federal, and local agencies.

The Oregon LCR Plan contains the following major elements:

- a description of the context and process of plan development
- species background information and population structure of the lower Columbia River area
- criteria used for analyses
- analyses of current status and an evaluation of the gaps between current status and different extinction risk levels for each population
- a description of limiting factors and threats impacting each population
- a description of the desired extinction risk status and threat reduction scenario for each population
- a list of recovery strategies and management actions
- a description of the research, monitoring, and evaluation, and associated measurable criteria, necessary to assess populations, make delisting decisions, understand uncertainties, and allow adaptive management in the future
- a timeline, cost, and potential implementer(s) for recovery actions
- an implementation structure and adaptive management framework
- details for moving from the initial recovery goal of de-listing to a more ambitious goal of "broad sense" recovery

What are the goals of this plan?

The goal of this plan is ultimately to restore Oregon's native salmon and steelhead populations and the watersheds that support them to productive and sustainable levels that will provide substantial environmental, cultural, and economic benefits. In the language of recovery planning, this equates to restoring each salmon and steelhead population in the lower Columbia River to the point where they are at a very low risk of extinction. However, the first step toward achieving this "broad sense" recovery goal is to improve populations to levels where lower Columbia River salmon and steelhead can be de-listed under the ESA.

To achieve de-listing, the status of lower Columbia River salmon and steelhead in both Washington and Oregon must be considered. De-listing targets were developed in an iterative process based on what is needed for the ESU to pass de-listing criteria as a whole across Oregon and Washington, as well as assessments of the feasibility of improving individual populations' statuses.

What are the key actions?

- Tributary habitat
 - Protect intact habitat
 - Restore degraded habitat
 - Provide incentives for landowners and adequate resources for agencies
 - Provide education, outreach, and increased technical support
 - Improve coordination (more effective watershed scale restoration and management)
 - Encourage land use practices that do not further degrade habitat conditions (e.g. forest to urban, development outside of floodplain)
 - Act as quickly as possible
- Estuary habitat
 - Protect intact habitat and restore degraded habitat
 - Improve access to off-channel habitat
 - Reduce the impacts of stormwater runoff
 - Reduce inputs of toxins
 - Prevent introduction of invasive species
- Dams and hydropower
 - Reduction of habitat impacts in the estuary from an altered hydrograph, impaired sediment routing, and damaged food webs due to Columbia Basin hydropower
 - Improved passage at tributary hydropower dams
- Fish harvest
 - Fisheries that affect fall Chinook and coho will be managed on a sliding scale that considers marine survival and parental escapements, and also manages for a weak stratum in each ESU on a mark-selective basis
 - Fisheries targeting Youngs Bay and Big Creek fall Chinook and coho will continue to be managed to provide

for greater sport and commercial opportunities in focused areas that limit the fishery impacts to those populations

- Hatchery fish
 - Populations targeted for moderate risk of extinction will be managed for a maximum average of 30% hatchery strays spawning in the wild, while those targeted for low or very low risk levels will be managed for a maximum average of 10% hatchery strays
- Predation
 - Manage pikeminnow and other piscivorous fish, including introduced species and hatchery fish, to reduce predation
 - Reduce predation by Caspian terns and double-crested cormorants
 - Reduce predation by marine mammals at Bonneville Dam
- Chum recovery
 - reintroduce chum in the Coast stratum initially, utilizing a conservation hatchery program
 - protect and restore chum habitat throughout the ESU

The Importance of Research, Monitoring, and Evaluation

For the Oregon LCR Plan to be successful, uncertainty must be reduced, progress must be documented, and recovery lessons must be applied adaptively. The Oregon LCR Plan includes a description of an Adaptive Management process that will rely on research, monitoring and evaluation (RME) to resolve uncertainties and assess the effectiveness of plan implementation. For example, there is uncertainty that naturally reproducing chum and fall Chinook salmon occur in many population areas. The RME section of the recovery plan includes actions to better identify and quantify the numbers of naturally produced fish to help resolve this uncertainty.

Implementation

Implementation of recovery actions has been occurring in all threat categories since ESA listing in the late 1990s. Many very beneficial actions have taken place under the leadership and cooperation of a number of agencies, organizations, and landowners. The intent of the Oregon LCR Plan is to focus those actions in the most important areas and provide a prioritized roadmap for future actions. To this end, the Oregon LCR Plan calls for coordination and communication of efforts from the ground level to the inter-state ESU level, and across other related resource management groups within Oregon. To achieve this coordination and communication, the plan calls for an Implementation Coordinator position to be established which will have overall responsibility for coordinating and tracking implementation at all levels. In addition, an Implementation Team which works with local implementers and advises the new Implementation Coordinator will be established. A key component of coordination will be development by the Implementation Team and the Implementation Coordinator of a detailed, three-year Implementation Schedule which will outline site-specific, prioritized projects, with costs, timeframe, and responsible parties, based on Oregon

LCR Plan actions.

The Department will play a significant role in implementation of the Oregon LCR Plan, including:

- providing technical support and coordination for habitat actions
- continuing efforts to reduce Federal Columbia River Power System impacts on salmon and steelhead
- working with co-managers and constituents to implement coho and fall Chinook harvest modifications
- reducing hatchery strays onto natural spawning grounds
- working with co-managers to reduce predation impacts
- establishing a conservation hatchery and reintroduction program for chum
- conducting RME for status and trends
- coordinating, tracking, and reporting Oregon LCR Plan activities in multiple forums

Next Steps

When the Oregon LCR Plan is brought back to the Commission (anticipated in August 2010), the Commission will be asked to approve the plan and adopt rules, per the Native Fish Conservation Policy. Draft rules will be consistent with the NFCP as well as other conservation plan rules recently adopted. The draft rules will be based upon content of the Oregon LCR Plan, though they will provide general strategies without the myriad details of the Oregon LCR Plan. Any existing basin plan rules will also be modified and/or replaced as consistent with the Oregon LCR Plan.

Once adopted by the Commission, the Oregon LCR Plan will be submitted to NOAA Fisheries for inclusion in the ESU-wide federal recovery plan. The federal recovery plan is expected to be approved in the fall of 2011 and will go through a public comment period prior to approval. If comments arise specific to the Oregon LCR Plan during the federal review period necessitating significant revision to the Oregon LCR Plan, it will be brought back to the Commission for approval of modifications.

OPTIONS

1. Provide comments and/or guidance to staff about the Oregon LCR Plan and/or forthcoming draft rules.

**STAFF
RECOMMENDATION**

NA

DRAFT MOTION	NA
EFFECTIVE DATE	NA