Commission Testimony, February 18, 2022

Chair Wahl, Commissioners, and Director Melcher. Thank you for the opportunity to provide you some thoughts on a topic of great importance to me and many of my friends and fellow anglers. That is the serious decline in the North Umpqua wild summer steelhead population.

My name is Jeff Dose. I reside in Roseburg along the North Umpqua River. I'm a retired Fisheries Biologist with 31 years of experience in the Umpqua Basin. I am a member of several conservation organizations and coalitions concerned with the health of the North Umpqua River.

The topic I'd like to address is what I clearly believe is a needed, and appropriate, change to the Coastal Multi-species Management Plan (CMP). Specifically, since adoption of the CMP, there has been some dramatically changed conditions to the environment within the North Umpqua basin from wildfires and accelerated climate change. The status of the wild summer steelhead population has also changed, with a substantial declining trend. The 2021 return of wild summers to the North Umpqua was, by far, the lowest since counting began in 1946.

There is a potential action, supported by the scientific community, that could be taken to reverse the decline. The action is entirely within the purview of the Department. That is to eliminate the adverse effects from the summer steelhead hatchery program. The department has limited authority regarding the multitude of environmental factors (e.g., land management practices, water usage, ocean productivity, etc.) in the declining trend for wild summer steelhead. But you do have considerable authority with the biological factors.

Fortunately, we have an example of the potential effectiveness of this biological response with a closely related population. That is the significant upward trend of North Umpqua wild winter steelhead subsequent to the cessation of that hatchery program. The population dramatically rebounded after two generations without hatchery fish.

The environmental and biological conditions affecting the long-term persistence and abundance of wild NU summer steelhead represent a great risk. The social and economic benefits from a robust run of wild NU summer steelhead are great but are threatened. One action that you, the Commission, can take to reverse this trajectory is to amend the CMP, and direct the ODFW to eliminate the NU summer steelhead hatchery program. It won't solve all the threats but will go a long way towards that goal. One final thought, the genetic diversity inherent in a wild steelhead population will provide for greatly improved resiliency that will be needed to cope with changing environmental factors.

Thank you.