

## Coastal Multi-Species Conservation and Management Plan North Coast Stratum Stakeholder Team

### Meeting Summary

**Date:** October 1-2, 2012  
**Location:** Tillamook, Oregon  
**Participants:** **Stakeholder Team:** Ray Monroe, Jack Smith, Mike Herbel, Ian Ferguson, Allan Moore, Shawn Reiersgaard, Melyssa Graeper, Garry Bullard, Mark Labhart, Sara LaBorde, Gary Kish,  
**Staff:** Todd Hoodenpyl, Chris Knutsen, Rick Klumph, Dan Avery, Lindsay Adrean, Robert Bradley, Ron Rehn, Paul Atwood, Ed Bowles, Tom Stahl, Kevin Goodson, Jay Nicholas, Jim Owens, Debbi Farrell

### Welcome/Introductions/Review of Agenda

Jim Owens, Facilitator, welcomed everyone at 1:00 p.m., October 1, 2012 to the Coastal Multi-Species Conservation and Management Plan North Coast Stratum Stakeholder Team meeting. The goal of the meeting was to review the draft (“strawman”) portfolio distributed by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) and recommend a proposed stratum portfolio to ODFW.

Ed Bowles, ODFW Fish Division Administrator, thanked the group for their participation. In the past, the development of management plans has typically taken multiple years. This process is an experiment to compress the planning process through development of a “strawman” proposal for review. The focus is on actions and risks, rather than abundance numbers. One of the goals is to balance conservation with fishing opportunities through management of hatcheries and harvest levels. The Department would also like to identify areas that would be suitable for wild fish emphasis and for harvest opportunities.

The process includes Stakeholder Team recommendations on portfolio objectives, hatchery fish programs, harvest programs, predation, and habitat improvements. Individual stratum team recommendations will then be integrated into a comprehensive coastwide portfolio. That integrated portfolio, along with the identification of any additional recommendations that are needed from the Stakeholder Teams, will be circulated for review to the Stakeholder Teams before a draft Plan is prepared. The format (meetings or via email) for receiving feedback on the integrated portfolio is to be determined. It is envisioned that a draft Plan will be completed in January 2013, at which time stratum groups are likely to be reconvened to review the Plan prior to it being distributed for general public comment. The process for review and approval by the Fish and Wildlife Commission will follow, with additional comment opportunities provided as part of that process.

Public comment will be accepted at specific times during stakeholder meetings, when a draft Plan is released to the public, and during the Commission process. There are comment cards available to submit comments in addition to the regular opportunities. The opinion poll is still in the process of being created by Oregon State University.

## Decision-Making Basis and Scope

The group discussed the nature of the actions being proposed by ODFW. The “strawman” portfolio is intended as a starting point for discussions to assist in developing management strategies that achieve the goals of decreasing conservation risk and increasing fishing opportunity. Jim Owens reviewed the Operating Assumptions that were initially presented at the orientation sessions and that are to serve as the basis of the Stakeholder Team’s recommendations (Draft Portfolio, page 2). He then identified the two over-arching evaluation criteria that should be applied to recommendations:

- (1) Are the recommendations responsive to the Operating Assumptions?
- (2) Do the recommendations provide a balanced portfolio perspective, at both the stratum and coastwide levels?

Jay Nicholas, Wild Salmon Center, provided background on the concept of developing a portfolio of fish management approaches. He then provided historical information on abundance, harvest levels and composition of harvest for coho salmon, fall and spring Chinook salmon and winter steelhead. Coho salmon and fall Chinook salmon are most abundant; fall Chinook salmon harvest levels are higher including a large number of them being wild. Smaller numbers are harvested of wild coho salmon and winter steelhead. The majority of winter steelhead harvested are hatchery fish.

Tom Stahl, ODFW Assistant Conservation and Recovery Program Manager, summarized the Current Status Assessment previously presented at the orientation sessions. That assessment indicates that all populations are healthy and viable in this stratum, which does not mean that the populations are at historic levels.

Staff then provided a quick overview of the portfolio organization and strawman portfolio recommendations.

General comments included:

- Need to add a section on coho in the description of hatchery and fisheries strategies.
- The Plan needs to include the Department’s philosophy behind its recommendations.

## Objectives

After some discussion, there was consensus support for the following objectives as guidance for consideration of specific actions:

1. Protect and restore populations of conservation concern (per the Native Fish Conservation Policy)
  - Address limiting factors with appropriate actions and identify target threat levels.
2. Protect rare species and life-history strategies (chum, summer and spring Chinook, summer steelhead)
3. Maintain healthy populations (no backsliding)
4. Maintain overall hatchery production by using the best management practices and available science; no global shifts in hatchery production, better fishing
5. Identify smaller or less accessible hatchery-based fisheries for shifts to other locations
6. Protect and emphasize current wild fish fisheries and maintain or improve them into the future
7. Seek new opportunities for both hatchery and wild fish fisheries
8. Identify and prioritize critical uncertainties, monitoring, and adaptive management practices

The group also felt that there should be a vision statement for the Plan itself. It was agreed that the goals identified in the Native Fish Conservation Policy should be added as the vision statement. Those goals are:

1. Prevent the serious depletion of any native fish species by protecting natural ecological communities, conserving genetic resources, managing consumptive and non-consumptive fisheries, and using hatcheries responsibly so that naturally produced native fish are sustainable.
2. Maintain and restore naturally produced native fish species, taking full advantage of the productive capacity of natural habitats, in order to provide substantial ecological, economic, and cultural benefits to the citizens of Oregon.
3. Foster and sustain opportunities for sport, commercial, and tribal fishers consistent with the conservation of naturally produced native fish and responsible use of hatcheries.

## **Hatchery Fish Programs**

Kevin Goodson provided an overview of current ODFW hatchery fish programs and the strawman proposal for hatchery program changes. He noted that the Department's goal is to introduce wild fish harvest where there is low risk and any reductions in production are intended to reduce conservation risk by shifting impacts and improve fisheries at popular accessible sites. It has been determined that unfed fry are not proving to be very successful in providing fish for fisheries and cannot be marked. Releasing smolts provides much higher survival.

General discussion included:

- Strategies should be identified to increase the harvest of hatchery fish released.
- The risk factors related to using out-of-basin hatchery broodstock need to be considered.

### Coho

There were no comments on the proposal to maintain existing coho hatchery release levels on the North Fork Nehalem and Trask Rivers.

### Fall Chinook

*Recommendation:* Consensus to support the strawman proposal to maintain the current 25,000 release level for the Necanicum; for phasing out the Miami, Kilchis, Trask and Nestucca rivers' unfed fry programs; for increasing smolt releases in the Trask River from 113,000 to 150,000; and for maintaining the current 100,000 smolt release level in the Nestucca River.

### Spring Chinook

*Recommendation:*

- Consensus to support strawman proposal to shift the Wilson River program to the Trask River, as well as increase releases in the Trask River for a total increase from the current level of 220,000 to 400,000 releases. Note that this program includes 100,000 fish reared with Whiskey Creek STEP.
- Consensus to support an increase from 110,000 to 200,000 releases in the Nestucca River.
- Consensus that the Department assess the feasibility of acclimating 30,000 spring Chinook salmon into the tidewater portion of the Little Nestucca River. The intent would be to provide a fishery in an underutilized area with good access (provided there is volunteer support and funding found for staffing, equipment, and monitoring). The determination whether these 30,000 are new production or from the Nestucca release of 200,000 will be a future decision after support and funding are found.

## Winter Steelhead

### *Recommendation:*

- Consensus to support continuation of the 40,000 release in the Necanicum River and the 90,000 release in the North Fork Nehalem River. The Necanicum River program is to be managed to reduce the number of hatchery steelhead that spawn in the wild, likely by identifying a tributary for releases (rather than the mainstem), with the possibility of using weirs to retain returning hatchery adults.
- Consensus to support the strawman proposal to phase out the Kilchis River program.
- Consensus to increase hatchery releases on the Wilson River by 10,000 to a total of 150,000.
- The majority did not support the strawman proposal to reduce the Nestucca River hatchery release numbers by transferring 30,000 releases to a new release program on the Little Nestucca River. Rather, the majority felt that these should continue to be released in the Nestucca River (and the program should be maintained at the 110,000 release level).
- There was no decision on whether to shift away from the stock #47 brood (Asea) to all wild brood in the Wilson and Nestucca.

## Summer Steelhead

*Recommendation:* Consensus to support strawman proposal to phase out the Wilson River program and to shift it to the Nestucca River program for an increase from 70,000 to 100,000 smolts.

## **Harvest Management Actions**

Kevin Goodson presented the strawman matrix for Retention/Non-Retention designations and associated Retention Schedule for proposed **wild** fish harvest changes. A sliding scale retention schedule was created to assist in determining retention levels for each Species Management Unit (SMU). A conservation level will also be identified to ensure the viability of populations is not jeopardized by harvest or other impacts. Abundance level thresholds for the sliding scale harvest matrix will be based on past abundance data collected. The abundance for each stratum will be looked at based on the sliding scale, rather than by individual water body. Escapement numbers will be evaluated as the process goes forward and adaptive management will be used to modify if necessary.

Discussion included:

- Questions/comments about the methods used to calculate the abundance numbers and the proposed bag limits for wild fish retention. There was also discussion on the catch numbers in the ocean versus inland.
- The issue was raised whether there is a demand for wild steelhead retention and the risks it presents. Ed Bowles shared that the goal of the wild steelhead fishery is to provide more opportunity, with this opportunity available to some degree in each stratum. The data available currently show healthy populations in these areas and it would provide an opportunity not currently offered. For this reason, ODFW may move forward with some harvest option in this stratum (e.g., a limited entry fishery in the Trask River).

## Coho

*Recommendation:* Consensus to support the strawman proposal to change the designation from Retention to Non-Retention for the Trask, Tillamook and Nestucca Rivers and keep the wild coho fishery restricted to the Tillamook, Nestucca, and Nehalem Bays.

### Fall Chinook, Spring Chinook, Chum, and Cutthroat Trout

No changes to current management designations for retention of wild fish were proposed and there were no comments on these programs.

### Winter Steelhead

*Recommendation:* There was general support for maintaining the current Non-Retention designations for the Nehalem River (10 opposed to changing to Retention and 1 supportive) and for the Trask River (8 opposed to changing to Retention and 3 supportive). There was some support for a fishery in the Trask River if a limited entry harvest system was in place with a cap on the number of tags to be allocated and a size limit on what could be harvested, but there was not consensus on this proposal.

### Retention Schedule

The group discussed the proposed wild fish harvest numbers resulting from the proposed bag limit regulations, and whether the fisheries in this area have the potential to have more pressure than other areas due to the proximity of metropolitan areas. Other comments included having the Plan reflect a more precautionary note on ocean harvest.

#### *Recommendation:*

- Consensus for the concept of a sliding scale for harvest that would be set at the stratum level, unless there was a conservation concern for a specific population that required different regulation than the stratum regulations.
- Consensus for the proposed bag limits for coho, summer Chinook and cutthroat trout. To help protect the summer Chinook salmon population in the Nehalem River, the group recommended extending the “protected” season for spring/summer Chinook salmon by two weeks to September 15.
- Consensus for a 1/5 (1 day / 5 season) bag limit for fall Chinook salmon in lower than average return years and a 2/20 bag limit in higher than average return years. For the average year, there was no consensus for the proposed 1/10 bag limit (8 opposed and 4 supportive) or for an alternative proposal for a 2/10 bag limit (6 opposed and 6 supportive).
- On the question of how to apply annual retention limits for Chinook salmon across strata, there was no consensus for either one annual bag limit that applies to the entire Coastal planning area (e.g., under average conditions the limit in the entire Coastal area is 10 fish) or separate bag limits for each stratum that are additive for the Coastal planning area (e.g., under average conditions allowing 10 fish to be kept from each stratum, capped by the existing statewide annual limit of 20); 3 members supported one Coastal area bag limit and 5 members supported the additive approach.
- There was general agreement (8 supportive) that within a stratum, the limit on spring/summer Chinook salmon should be a sub-component of the limit on Chinook salmon (e.g., if the annual limit is 10 fall Chinook salmon and 5 summer Chinook salmon, no more than 5 Chinook salmon could be caught during the “protected” summer Chinook season and those that are caught would count under the 10 Chinook limit as well).
- The retention schedule for steelhead was not discussed because there was no support for retention.

### Mandatory Return of Tags and Guide Logbooks

#### *Recommendation:*

- Consensus to support the mandatory return of daily/annual harvest cards and modification of the information requested on harvest tags
- In response to concerns about the requirement of guides submitting logbook information, there was consensus to coordinate such a requirement with the Oregon State Marine Board, with the assumption that it would be phased in starting with a voluntary pilot project.

### Angling Regulation Proposals

Three ODFW proposals from the 2013 Angling Regulation development process were referred to the group for review.

*Recommendation:* In order to protect spawning fish and reduce the targeting of female Chinook salmon for their eggs, consensus to support moving Chinook salmon harvest deadlines downstream in the Nehalem River (to Foss Road bridge), Wilson River (to Jordan Creek), and Nestucca River (to 5<sup>th</sup> Bridge).

### **Predation Management Actions**

Lindsay Adrean, ODFW Avian Predation Coordinator, provided an overview of the work being done relative to avian predation on the coast. This year there were five hazing programs. The Department is in the process of gathering information to support a depredation request to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for permission to lethally remove birds. This fall, Oregon State University will evaluate stomach samples gathered by the Department. ODFW is seeking partners for additional hazing efforts and to assist in gathering survey data.

*Recommendation:*

- Consensus to support the strawman proposal for predation management actions.
- Consensus to add an action to encourage habitat improvements to benefit eagle populations. Data indicates that an increase in eagle populations lowers the number of cormorants and other seabirds.

### **Habitat Management Actions**

Ed Bowles provided an overview of the habitat portion of the proposal. The Department does not have regulatory authority over habitat work; rather, it works with a number of other agencies, entities, and individuals on habitat restoration and protection. One of the goals of this plan will be to provide a “fish perspective” to habitat restoration work by identifying priority 6<sup>th</sup>-Field HUCs (Hydrologic Unit Code; “6HUCs”) to focus efforts that benefit fish rather than identifying site-specific actions or limiting factors (excluding populations that are currently assessed as “non-viable”), which are being determined through other efforts. ODFW will be collecting information gathered by other groups to identify areas for improvement.

The strawman proposal is for habitat improvement in 20% of the 6HUCs in each population. The percentage is meant to account for the various uncertainties in population numbers that will arise in the future (e.g., ocean conditions, climate change, development, etc). A goal that all 6HUCs are at least maintained at their current level of habitat quality is also proposed. The goal is to improve overall habitat function and quality in some areas without losing function and quality in other areas.

Stakeholders will be invited to participate on a technical review team that will review and comment on the methods used to characterize and prioritize 6HUCs. The meeting will likely be held in November.

*Recommendation:* Consensus to support the strawman proposal for a 20 percent improvement in 6HUCs, with the goal to ensure no backsliding. It was also agreed that it would be beneficial to identify and focus on areas that have the greatest potential to support wild fish populations.

## **Strongholds**

Ed Bowles briefly described the concept of salmon strongholds - where healthy, diverse, and/or unique population areas are identified and targeted for protection. In the North Coast stratum, the Tillamook-Nehalem complex has been identified as a statewide stronghold in another process. There was general agreement with the concept of identifying strongholds and for characterizing the Tillamook-Nehalem complex as such.

## **Public Comment**

No public comment was provided on either day.

## **Summary and Adjourn**

In response to an inquiry from Jim Owens about how well the team's recommendations respond to the Objectives and over-arching evaluation criteria, members expressed mixed levels of comfort, indicating either that the recommendations provide an adequate balance between conservation and fishing opportunities, or that they fail to capitalize on additional fishing opportunities, or that they amount to excessive risk to wild fish populations.

Specific discussion topics identified for discussion during the integration phase included:

- Strongholds
- Application of retention bag limits at a coastwide or stratum level.

The meeting adjourned at 3:00 p.m. on October 2, 2012.