

*Rogue–South Coast Multi-Species Conservation and Management Plan  
(RSP)*

**2024 Annual Report**

Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife  
December 2024

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## Introduction

The *Rogue–South Coast Multi-Species Conservation and Management Plan* (RSP) was developed to ensure the continued viability and conservation of winter steelhead, summer steelhead, coho salmon, and coastal cutthroat trout Species Management Units (SMUs) along the Oregon Coast from the Elk River in the north to the Winchuck River in the south, and to achieve a desired status that provides substantial ecological and societal benefits. The RSP is consistent with requirements for conservation plans described in the Oregon Native Fish Conservation Policy (OAR 635-007-0502 to 0509) and was approved by the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission in December 2021. RSP implementation is also guided by the Climate and Ocean Change Policy (OAR 635-900-0001 to 0020) adopted by the Oregon Fish and Wild Commission in July 2020. To track progress toward plan goals, the RSP calls for annual reports consisting of an update on plan implementation (this document), *Wild Fish Monitoring Summaries*, and *Hatchery Program Summaries*. These documents are available at the RSP website: [https://www.dfw.state.or.us/fish/CRP/rogue\\_south\\_coast\\_multi-species\\_conservation%20and%20Management\\_plan.asp](https://www.dfw.state.or.us/fish/CRP/rogue_south_coast_multi-species_conservation%20and%20Management_plan.asp). The 2024 annual report summarizes plan implementation since November 2023 and the most recent monitoring results available for each SMU.

## Progress Toward Desired Status

Table 1. Comparisons of current observed status with desired and conservation status thresholds for RSP status metrics (year in parentheses indicates most recent metric results available). Numbers in bold indicate values above desired status; underlined values are below conservation status thresholds (see *Wild Fish Monitoring Summaries* for additional details).

Status Metrics	5-yr average	Desired Status	2-yr average	Conservation Status
<b>Winter Steelhead</b>				
Coastal Stratum Juvenile Abundance Index (2023)	68,905	≥ 80,000	81,353	< 40,000
Coastal Stratum Juvenile Site Occupancy (2023)	<b>99%</b>	≥ 90%	99%	< 75%
Huntley Wild Half-Pounder Count (2024)	757	≥ 1,000	620	< 300
<b>Summer Steelhead</b>				
Huntley Wild Late-run Summer Steelhead (2024)	5,484	≥ 11,000	3,710	< 3,250
<b>Coho Salmon</b>				
Elk River Spawner Abundance Index (2023)	215	≥ 800	234	< 150
Huntley Wild Adult Coho Abundance (2023)	4,987	≥ 10,000	5,715	< 1,870
<b>Cutthroat Trout</b>				
Coastal Stratum Abundance Index (2023)	22,996	≥ 28,000	15,687	< 6,500
Coastal Stratum Site Occupancy (2023)	<b>97%</b>	≥ 90%	97%	< 75%

## Management Actions

To address the limiting factors causing the gap between Current and Desired Status, and meet other plan goals, the RSP identifies strategies and actions in seven categories (*Habitat Actions*, *Other Species Actions*, *Hatchery Actions*, *Fishing Actions*, *Research and Monitoring Actions*, *Outreach/Enforcement Actions*, and *Facilities Actions*). The following sections have implementation highlights for each of those categories in November 2023–October 2024. The information presented below is not intended to be comprehensive and does not include many ongoing actions being implemented under the RSP. *Habitat Actions* are occurring across the SMUs at various scales; a sampling of those actions completed or initiated in 2024 are included in the highlights below.

### I. *Habitat Actions*

- **Action I.B.1:** Barrier removal continues at a rapid pace on the Rogue. Since 2004, at least 50 barriers to fish passage have been removed in the interior Rogue watershed, and 12 sites now have improved conditions for passage. The ability for fish to move freely to different parts of the basin where conditions meet their specific needs at any point in their life (e.g., spawning, rearing) is critical to population health and resilience.

*Williams-Whalen Dam* at river mile 12.7 on Evans Creek was removed in June, continuing work in this subbasin that began with the removal of Fielder Dam (RM 3.0) and Wimer Dam (RM 9.0) in 2017. All were abandoned dams for defunct irrigation districts. All projects were led by WaterWatch, with help from staff at the Rogue River Watershed Council and multiple partners including US Fish and Wildlife Service, BLM, and ODFW. All projects are good news for fish and resilience.

*Pomeroy Dam*, the only dam on the mainstem of the Illinois River, was removed in August 2024. This WaterWatch project also moves the irrigation diversion at least two miles downstream to two new fish-friendly pumps, decommissions two miles of canal, re-meanders 1.5 miles of a Coho-bearing creek, and corrects fish passage issues at four canal-creek junctions and four road-creek crossings, including three county road culverts. Passage at Jimmy Creek and a bad culvert crossing on a tributary of Free and Easy Creek has been restored. Multiple partners were involved including the Rogue Basin Partnership, US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Forest Service, NOAA, BLM, and others including ODFW. Congressionally designated funding was facilitated by Senator Merkley via the Rogue River Watershed Council.

A large push up dam located below the forks of Little Butte Creek was removed in 2024 and replaced with a roughened channel combined with large woody debris. The work was completed by the Rogue River Watershed Council.

Passage was improved by ODOT at the Highway 99 crossing on Millers Gulch, a small summer steelhead tributary near Valley of the Rogue State Park. Juvenile steelhead will benefit, and passage is improved for adult steelhead during low flow years.

- **Action I.B.1:** As part of the Rogue Watershed Resiliency Initiative, ODFW received Federal Highway Administration grant funding (USDOT National Culvert AOP Program) for work at

several road crossings in Josephine County. The project evolved into a coordinated project with the Oregon Department of Transportation focusing on two crossings on Fruitdale Creek in Grants Pass. Additional funds are needed, but project completion is expected within two to three years. We hope to continue working with Josephine County and eventually Jackson County to restore passage and improve community infrastructure at these key lower elevation stream crossings to benefit Plan species.

- **Action 1.B.1:** In a related action, enforcement of fish passage rules continued. A lot of effort by district staff went into notching an illegal dam on Jumpoff Joe Creek. Large logs were used to build the structure, and yards of plastic sheeting, astroturf, and blankets were used to seal the dam. About three large trash bags of material were disposed.
- **Action 1.B.1:** ODFW continued to monitor conditions for passage in the vicinity of the abandoned sewer line on Bear Creek in downtown Medford. Erosion at a weir below the sewer line created a new and significant barrier to passage. A passage improvement project, funded by a WaterSMART Grant from the Bureau of Reclamation, is expected to be completed in 2025.
- **Action 1.B.1:** One fish passage barrier was removed from the Chetco Watershed in 2024. The Nell Creek culvert completely blocked fish passage into the creek. Fish passage was restored which opened 1.5 miles of the stream to Chinook, coho, steelhead, and lamprey.
- **Action 1.B.1:** ODFW participated in the Blackberry Creek (Elk River Watershed) partnership working to improve fish passage into the creek. The culvert is scheduled to be replaced with a bridge in 2025 once again allowing juvenile salmonids and lamprey to access the creek. Passage for winter steelhead, coho, and Chinook will improve dramatically over the current conditions.
- **Action 1.B.2:** The list of priority barriers and essential salmonid habitat was updated in 2024 for the ODFW South Coast District.
- **Action 1.B.2:** A review of Rogue barriers was completed for the 2024 update of the Statewide Fish Passage Priority List.
- **Action 1.B.7** Two long needed fish screen upgrades were completed in 2024.

The Messenger Ditch screen replacement was completed on a gravity fed irrigation ditch with a diversion on Deer Creek (Illinois River). The fish screen was replaced with a flat panel passive screen at the point of diversion. The new design will limit the amount of disturbance in the creek (no longer will a push up dam be needed). The passive screen will have lower maintenance cost and prevent fish from entering the ditch altogether. The new fish diversion and piped ditch will allow the water user to be more efficient and have less of an impact to the creek.

The Obrien irrigation ditch diverts water from the West Fork Illinois River and crosses over O'Brien Creek. ODFW installed a new paddle wheel-driven rotary drum fish screen that meets current fish screening criteria. The new design works more efficiently and better in lower flow, and is more reliable. The bypass pipe has been updated from a 2" pipe to a 10" pipe. The small irrigation ditch in front of the screen was moved to behind the screen and piped with a headgate. The new screen will protect more fish and return them to O'Brien Creek which flows into the West Fork Illinois River.

- **Action 1.B.8:** Clearing for fuels reduction has resulted in riparian damage in several locations, prompting ODFW efforts to minimize and repair damage. The district is working with local Audubon, Rogue Riverkeeper and others to advocate for riparian protection. Testimony was provided to Central Point Parks in support of ensuring that riparian resources are a key component of the management plan for that city's portion of the Bear Creek Greenway. The group also working to improve Ashland's riparian ordinance.
- **Action 1.B.11:** ODFW worked with Oregon State Police and Oregon Department of State Lands to enforce a major fill and removal violation on the North Fork of the Chetco.
- **1.B.13.** A culvert barrier on urban Elk Creek on the Bear Creek Greenway was replaced with a bridge in 2024. Juvenile steelhead swim up into Elk Creek in winter. The project will greatly improve linear connectivity and effectively provide floodplain habitat for juvenile salmon and steelhead.
- **Action 1.C.1:** The Rogue District continued to work with Trout Unlimited's Rogue River Basin Water Project Coordinator. In addition, the district assisted the Water Program with hiring a new instream flow biologist. Bobby Buckmister began work in October 2024.
- **Action 1.C.5:** A long-term flow monitoring project to evaluate the effects of beaver activity on streamflow during drought continued in 2024 on a headwater tributary of Little Butte Creek. A former ranch is now the Vesper Meadow Restoration Preserve. Beavers are expected to colonize the creek as riparian vegetation heals from the impacts of overgrazing. Summer flow measurements at the most downstream site have ranged from about 0.4 to 1.0 cfs the last two years. Beaver dam analogues are being constructed which may unfortunately affect monitoring results short term. Monitoring is expected to continue for several decades.  
  
An intern is surveying streams for evidence of beaver use in the Evans Creek Beaver Emphasis Area. The project will continue into the next report year.
- **Action 1.C.14:** Private Forest Accord (PFA) funds were awarded for a project to remove a riprap berm, restore floodplain habitat, and improve connectivity of a cold, spring fed stream named Blue Heron Creek to Bear Creek in Phoenix.
- **1.C.17.** The Rogue District continues to work with the Grants Pass Irrigation District to improve conditions on some Rogue tributaries within the irrigation system. Time was spent salvaging fish with STEP volunteers on two stream reaches that go dry or intermittent after either conveying irrigation releases all summer or receiving flow from leaky canals. On Savage Creek, fish salvage is done only on a small county parcel. We may try to ask private landowners for additional stream access in the future.
- **Action 1.D.2:** ODFW met with the Siskiyou Coast Estuaries Partnership in 2024. The focus is on Sixes River habitat restoration priorities and implementing a hydraulic model to help guide restoration.

- **Action I.D.5:** Another round of spawning gravel finally made it into Big Butte Creek this year, in a targeted project augmenting spawning habitat in a unique reach of stream. The project, completed in partnership with the Bureau of Land Management, added approximately 250 cubic yards of spawning habitat for spring chinook in the lone Rogue tributary that supports an annual run of these fish. Both Coho and spring Chinook have been confirmed to spawn on gravel placed in Big Butte, so the work is consistent with the Upper Rogue Coho Strategic Action Plan. Winter steelhead will likely spawn in the augmentation sites as well. The work was completed using a cabled delivery system by Mark Villers and Blue Ridge Timber. Permitting and other challenges have delayed spawning gravel projects scheduled for Big Butte and the Rogue mainstem for several years

## ***II. Other Species Actions***

- **Action II.D.3:** Coordination on illegally introduced pikeminnow between Rogue staff and biologists from California Fish and Wildlife began in 2024. Both the Rogue and the Eel River were illegally stocked with pikeminnow (different species) the same year, and these fish are now widespread in both watersheds. On the Eel, biologists report the presence of large numbers of pikeminnow in coho winter habitat, and even significant predation on early migrating coho smolts. The inaugural pikeminnow fishing derby on the Eel resulted in the harvest of just over 500 fish. The Rogue derby was scheduled to try a new phone application until contracting issues became a problem, and the delay resulted in an abbreviated contest that brought in 341 pikeminnow. The largest pikeminnow in the Rogue derby measured 22 inches.
- **Action II.D.3:** Spot checks for pikeminnow presence and diet in Jumpoff Joe Creek were conducted on two dates in mid and late May. The diet on these late spring sampling dates appeared to be almost exclusively crayfish.

## ***III. Hatchery Actions***

- **Action III.B.1:** ODFW managed hatchery programs to meet release targets identified in the RSP, as well as Rogue Basin hatchery mitigation targets. Hatchery releases were affected by ongoing infrastructure and rearing issues at Cole Rivers Hatchery (see Evaluation and Adaptive Management section below). The hatchery powerline was repaired in 2023, so egg incubation procedures were back to normal this past season. Unfortunately, no hatchery summer steelhead smolts were released this spring from brood year 2023 because of a total loss at the hatchery. Approximately 69,000 summer steelhead smolts held over from brood year 2022 were released as two-year smolts May 2024.
- **Action III.D.3:** In spring 2024 ODFW acclimated and released approximately 15,000 hatchery steelhead smolts at the Skunk Creek acclimation site. The second smolt group experienced a spill of an unknown substance in the stream. On Sunday April 21, the neighboring landowner reported odd fish behavior and a few dead fish, along with an odd soapy/oily film. Staff contacted the Oregon Emergency Response System and drove to the site to create an opening in the screens so that fish would have a chance to reach the river. Extensive communication with the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) ensued over the next two days. DEQ

collected water samples and tracked down leads, but no source has been confirmed. The impact on that portion of the release is unknown. The district organized a follow up meeting with DEQ and the City of Grants Pass. Additional monitoring and testing is planned to keep the substance out of the creek and the river.

- **Action III.D.4:** In spring 2024, ODFW acclimated and released approximately 15,000 hatchery steelhead smolts at the Brockman Gulch/Jumpoff Joe Creek acclimation site.

#### ***IV. Fishing Actions***

- **Action IV.B.1:** ODFW continued implementation of the *Rogue-South Coast Steelhead Validation* and *Rogue-South Coast Wild Steelhead Harvest Tag*. The new authorizations were made available for purchase in November 2023 and were valid from December 1, 2023 through April 30, 2024.
- **Action IV.B.2:** In the 2023-2024 winter steelhead season, ODFW implemented interim winter steelhead angling regulations identified in Table 17 of the RSP. In the 2024-25 winter steelhead season, there will be changes in angling regulations for the Rogue Basin because the two-year average for the Rogue Stratum indicator (wild half-pounder counts at Huntley Park) fell below the conservation status threshold in 2023. See page 86 of the RSP for more information about conservation status triggers and how they apply to the winter steelhead fishery.

#### ***V. Research and Monitoring Actions***

Tables 18 and 19 of the RSP provide an overview of base monitoring components being conducted within SMUs to track measurable criteria that inform progress toward desired status. Data produced from the monitoring will be used to re-assess abundance and productivity, spatial structure, and diversity in the 12-year assessment called for in the plan. Monitoring is also necessary to implement winter steelhead fisheries. The RSP also identified research actions to address critical uncertainties relative to each SMU (Table 20). Research and monitoring action implementation in 2024 included the following:

- **Action V.A.2:** ODFW conducted winter steelhead spawning surveys in all six Coastal Stratum populations (Elk, Euchre, Hunter, Pistol, Chetco, and Winchuck) in 2024. High flows and turbid water limited surveys during the peak of winter steelhead spawning. Abundance estimates were not calculated due to the low confidence in the estimate. Wild winter steelhead harvest was calculated using data from the new *Rogue-South Coast Wild Steelhead Harvest Tag* and estimates were low in all populations (see *Wild Fish Monitoring Summaries*). Wild steelhead harvest rates could not be determined due to the lack of spawner abundance estimates, but partial redd counts available in several of the populations indicated that harvest rates were below plan limits.
- **Actions V.A.3, V.C.1:** Snorkel surveys were conducted in each of three locations in the Chetco Basin (NF Chetco, Emily Creek, and SF Chetco) to estimate pHOS at the population scale. High flows and turbid water limited survey access due to safety concerns. In addition, turbid waters limited visibility at most sites. ODFW was able to conduct additional pHOS survey in Pistol

River (see *Wild Fish Monitoring Summaries*). ODFW will use snorkel surveys for pHOS monitoring in other Coastal Stratum populations as time and resources allow.

- **Actions V.B.3, V.B.6:** ODFW conducted winter steelhead spawning surveys in the Upper Rogue population area in 2024, including surveys in the mainstem Rogue River and several major tributaries, to estimate winter steelhead spawner abundance. Using the spawner population estimate and an estimate of wild steelhead harvest from ELS, ODFW determined the wild steelhead harvest rate for this population, which was below the 15% limit identified in the RSP (see *Wild Fish Monitoring Summaries*).
- **Action V.B.7:** For the fourth consecutive year, ODFW conducted a creel survey of the Lower Rogue winter steelhead fishery to monitor harvest and the proportion of wild and hatchery steelhead caught in the fishery (including steelhead caught and released). Fishing conditions were near perfect all season which resulted in a very good picture of run timing between wild and hatchery steelhead. Creel survey data was used to estimate wild winter steelhead abundance for Rogue Stratum populations in aggregate; the estimated wild winter steelhead harvest rate was below the plan limit (see *Wild Fish Monitoring Summaries*).
- **Action V.B.9:** For the third consecutive year, ODFW conducted snorkel surveys at index sites in core juvenile coho salmon rearing areas in summer 2024 to monitor coho salmon abundance and site occupancy. Site occupancy results to date are summarized below.

Sampling Year	Site Occupancy (percentage)	Number of Sites Sampled
2022	➤ 90 %	➤ 30
2023	➤ 94 %	➤ 34
2024	➤ 88 %	➤ 34

## ***VI. Outreach/Enforcement Actions***

- **Action VI.A.1:** ODFW worked with volunteers and landowners to place permanent angling regulation signs on Hunter Creek to reduce illegal fishing in closed waters.
- **Action VI.B.6:** A *Rogue-South Coast Steelhead Validation* webpage ([link](#)) was maintained at the MyODFW.com website to provide all the information an angler needed to understand winter steelhead licensing requirements and answer frequently asked questions.
- **Action VI.C.1:** District staff participated in an outreach event organized by UNETE, a farmworker advocacy organization in the Rogue Valley. The event was well-attended, resulted in significant customer interaction and was an opportunity to increase the diversity of the angling public.
- **Action VI.E.3:** ODFW continued to partner with OSP on an expanded program of enforcement floats on the Upper Rogue. Directed at snagging during the spring chinook season, the blitz also facilitated interaction with early run summer steelhead anglers.
- **Action VI.F.1:** ODFW met with OSP to coordinate enforcement actions for the Rogue estuary fisheries.

- **Action VI.H.1:** The 2023 RSP Annual Report was completed and posted in November 2023.

## ***VII. Facilities Actions***

- **VII.A.2.** Material was purchased to repair the netpen used at the Brockman Gulch/Jumpoff Joe acclimation site.
- **VII.B.1** A lot of time was spent responding to poor behavior at multiple river access sites. Staff worked with ODOT to have concrete barriers installed at the river access property at Sardine Creek. This work was needed to reduce the risk of illegal camping at the site, and it will unfortunately reduce access to 2-4 parking spots.

## **Evaluation and Adaptive Management**

The previously discussed monitoring efforts and subsequent evaluation and adaptive management are important components of RSP implementation. Key evaluation and adaptive management actions that occurred in 2024 include the following:

- District staff continue to develop recommendations to adapt hatchery production to problems (e.g., inability to meet size at release targets; production losses) in ways to minimize impacts to naturally produced fish and minimize impacts to anglers. District staff worked with fish propagation staff to communicate recommendations to the USACE and coordinate on renovation planning and implementation.

## **Other**

- The Rogue spawning gravel team, led by Jim Peterson from the Oregon Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit continued to meet in 2024. A model for guiding gravel restoration and augmentation projects is being tested. The work will help implement management actions in the Rogue spring and fall Chinook conservation plans, and will also benefit wild winter steelhead that spawn in mainstem reaches of the Applegate and upper Rogue, in addition to providing general ecological uplift.
- District staff continued to participate in interagency cannabis calls and coordination. Raids are way down in 2024. In 2023 OWRD reported 295 enforcement actions in 2023 and 75% were cannabis related.
- ODFW organized a separate coordination call with staff from the Oregon Liquor Control Commission (OLCC) because a licensed marijuana producer continues to sell while failing to resolve environmental rule violations. Later the operators began finally moving towards compliance with Oregon Water Resource (OWRD) and Department of State Lands (DSL) requirements. Fish will get passage at two culverts on a small tributary due to a DSL consent order, and water back in Mendenhall Creek due to the OWRD order. The Floyd Ditch on Althouse Creek is active again with new water users that are likely growing cannabis. The

diversion looks OK for fish passage, but OWRD will be checking the diversion out of concern that the water right is being exceeded.

- In late 2023 the District checked and photographed culvert barriers in the Deer Creek subbasin to scope an additional infrastructure grant applications, and was surprised to find cannabis production and remnant cannabis infrastructure on every road travelled. One creek was not flowing at the county road crossing but was flowing upstream of a cannabis grow. OWRD has been contacted. Another grow in the subbasin that was previously cited for illegal reservoirs continues to store water illegally.
- Recommendations were provided to the Oregon Department of Agriculture for a Strategic Implementation Area in the Illinois subbasin. The four 12-digit HUCs selected include Upper Deer Creek, Lower Deer Creek, McMullen Creek (Lake Selmac area), and Kerby/Illinois Mainstem. Cannabis will hopefully be focus of the work.
- Rogue Riverkeeper contacted District staff about bank erosion on the Rogue River at an old aggregate pit in an area of several old pits and some active mining. An adjoining pit was captured by the 1997 flood, and the subsequent concern about a massive avulsion event resulted in OWEB funded work to strengthen the bank and reduce risk. In response to the new threat, River Design Group has been hired by the district to study the risk and develop alternatives. In the meantime the district believes the risk to fish and wildlife habitat merits emergency action. Extensive pit capture could disrupt gravel transport and could harm spawning gravel in the Rogue for decades.

## Summary

Fish passage restoration continues to be a highlight for the Rogue and Southwest Oregon, punctuating the extensive collective effort at restoration involving multiple partners and organizations. Planning for spawning gravel restoration and augmentation continues, while permitting hurdles are finally being met to facilitate implementation. Resources dedicated to streamflow restoration have increased. And with any luck, the early snowpack in November 2024 means an end to drought at least temporarily.

Monitoring activities benefitted from additional staff and resources dedicated to the planning area since RSP adoption, facilitating a full year of monitoring activities in year three of the plan. ODFW will continue to refine monitoring methods based on lessons learned. Wild half pounder returns increased after two years of lower counts, so no restrictions will be required for Rogue winter steelhead fishing in run year 2025-2026. Other measurable criteria for fish populations covered by the plan are well above conservation status levels, and some have remained above desired status thresholds, despite the multi-year drought affecting a large portion of the region. On the South Coast, completion of winter steelhead spawning ground surveys, pHOS snorkel surveys, juvenile steelhead and cutthroat snorkel surveys in some of the most remote and rugged terrain without injury to surveyors were key monitoring accomplishments.