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

2025 Annual Report

Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife
November 2025

Table of Contents

Introduction **2**

Progress Toward Desired Status **2**

Management Actions **3**

I. Habitat Actions **3**

II. Other Species Actions **5**

III. Hatchery Actions **5**

IV. Fishing Actions **6**

V. Research and Monitoring Actions **6**

VI. Outreach/Enforcement Actions **7**

VII. Facilities Actions **8**

Evaluation and Adaptive Management **8**

Summary **9**

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. The 2025 annual report summarizes plan implementation since November 2024 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
Winter Steelhead				
Coastal Stratum Juvenile Abundance Index (2024)	73,437	≥ 80,000	68,685	< 40,000
Coastal Stratum Juvenile Site Occupancy (2024)	**98%**	≥ 90%	97%	< 75%
Huntley Wild Half-Pounder Count (2025)	647	≥ 1,000	537	< 300
Summer Steelhead				
Huntley Wild Late-run Summer Steelhead (2025)	5,255	≥ 11,000	4,318	< 3,250
Coho Salmon				
Elk River Spawner Abundance Index (2024)	225	≥ 800	<u>117</u>	< 150
Huntley Wild Adult Coho Abundance (2024)	6,261	≥ 10,000	6,311	< 1,870
Cutthroat Trout				
Coastal Stratum Abundance Index (2024)	17,604	≥ 28,000	15,863	< 6,500
Coastal Stratum Site Occupancy (2024)	**97%**	≥ 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 2024–October 2025. 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 2025 are included in the highlights below.

I. Habitat Actions

- **Action I.B.1:** Since 2004, at least 50 barriers to fish passage have been removed in the interior Rogue watershed, and 17 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.

  Phase II of the Pomeroy Dam removal funds built on the successful removal of Pomeroy Dam in 2024 by removing or improving fish passage barriers along tributaries that intersected the now abandoned irrigation ditch. This WaterWatch of Oregon project has removed one check-board dam on Jimmy Creek, replaced a culvert on Free and Easy Creek, and is removing two other concrete water control structures on tributaries to Free and Easy Creek. In addition to improving fish passage at these four sites, critical sections of the irrigation ditch were filled in to avoid fish stranding in the future. Multiple partners were involved including Rogue Basin Partnership, US Fish and Wildlife Service, BLM, USFS, NOAA, and ODFW.

- **Action I.B.1:** ODFW partnered with the USFS and Illinois Valley Watershed Council to provide fish passage at a culvert on Horse Creek, a tributary of Briggs Creek in the Illinois River basin. ODFW helped to secure Good Neighbor Authority funds.

- **Action I.B.1:** In a related action, enforcement of fish passage rules continued. An unpermitted and undersized culvert was removed from Left Fork Foots Creek, tributary to the Rogue River.

- **Action I.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 and ODFW Fish Passage Compensation Funds, is expected to be completed in 2026.

- **Action I.B.1**: ODFW participated in the Blackberry Creek (Elk River Watershed) partnership working to improve fish passage into the creek. The culvert was scheduled to be replaced with a bridge in 2025. Funding was delayed until 2026. Improving passage will allow juvenile salmonids and lamprey to access the creek. Passage for winter steelhead, coho, and Chinook will improve dramatically over the current conditions.

- **Action I.B.2:** A review of fish passage barriers was completed for the 2024 update of the Statewide Fish Passage Priority List which was adopted by the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission in 2025.
- **Action I.B.7:** The *Klingle Meyers Ditch* diverts water from the South Fork of Little Butte Creek (tributary to Little Butte Creek) and was screened to criteria a long distance from the diversion point. Rogue River Watershed Council was improving passage, updating diversion structure, and piping through the screen site associated with this diversion. ODFW took this opportunity to complete major maintenance on worn out components, move screen and structure closer to the diversion point, and improve bypass conditions for fish returning to creek.
- **Action I.B.7:** The *Thompson Creek Irrigation Association* began diverting water from Thompson Creek (Applegate River tributary) after several decades of non-use. ODFW worked with OWRD and the Irrigation Association to identify which diversions would become active and was able to install temporary fish screens prior to any water diversions.
- **Action I.B.9:** ODFW worked with Josephine County Watershed Councils and Soil and Water Conservation Districts to draft a programmatic riparian restoration permit. The programmatic permit is a joint agreement between Josephine County Planning and ODFW to reduce County Planning fees for groups doing restoration work. As a result, restoration practitioners are only required to pay one County Planning Application fee per year, instead of one per project. A similar program has been in place in Jackson County for several years.
- **Action I.B.11**: ODFW worked with Oregon State Police and Oregon Department of State Lands to enforce several fill and removal violations and water quality violations on Hunter Creek.
- **Action I.B.11:** District and Habitat Division staff provided comments and recommended language to the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality for the WPCF 600 permit renewal. The WPCF 600 is a general permit for mineral mining adjacent to streams.
- **Action I.B.13:** Lazy Creek, a small urban tributary to Bear Creek in Medford, had a roughened channel constructed to provide fish passage. The roughened channel replaced a nearly six-foot-tall passage barrier associated with a foot bridge in the city park. This fish passage project was completed by the City of Medford as a mitigation required by the Oregon Department of State Lands. Local ODFW staff assisted with the fish salvage.
- **Action I.C.1:** ODFW Water Program developed multiple projects with Trout Unlimited, including senior instream leasing projects on Evans Creek and two water efficiency projects, one being on Deer Creek in Selma and the other on Hukill Creek in Butte Falls. These will result in senior instream protections if funded. Projects include senior priority dates from 1856-1902.
- **Action I.C.2:** The ODFW Water Program continued outreach to landowners and other NGO's focused on restoration options and project identification across the Rogue Basin. Efforts focused in the South Fork Little Butte Creek, Evans Creek, Williams Creek, Thompson Creek, and Grave Creek watersheds.
- **Action I.C.5:** A long-term flow monitoring project to evaluate the effects of beaver activity on streamflow during drought continued in 2025 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 three years. Beaver dam analogues (BDAs) are being constructed, which may unfortunately affect monitoring results in the short term. Monitoring is expected to continue for several decades.

- **Action I.C.6:** The first phase of the Mace Property stream and riparian restoration project was implemented this year by removing non-native riparian vegetation. ODFW will be installing several large wood structures and continuing non-native vegetation management in 2026.
- **Action I.C.14:** The Blue Heron Creek berm removal and channel reconstruction was funded by Private Forest Accord funds in 2024 and implemented in 2025. This project reconnected a spring-fed tributary to Bear Creek near Pheonix and restored floodplain function. Riparian vegetation monitoring and replanting will occur over the next several years. This project will provide summer thermal refuge and winter forage for juvenile salmonids.
- **Action I.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.
- **Action I.D.2**: ODFW added more large wood into an unnamed tributary to Deer Creek on the Siskiyou Field Institute property near Selma in the Illinois River basin. An initial phase of large wood was placed in the stream 2024. The 2025 placement added more pieces of wood and complexity to the structures. This was a low-dollar project that was constructed on a stream that had coho salmon observations following the 2024 wood placement.

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 and continued in 2025. Both the Rogue River and the Eel River had illegal introductions of 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.

III. Hatchery Actions

- **Action III.B.1**: ODFW managed hatchery programs with the goal of meeting release targets identified in the RSP, as well as USACE Rogue Basin hatchery mitigation obligations. Release targets were not met for all programs in 2025 (see *Hatchery Program Summaries*).
- **Action III.D.3:** In spring 2025 ODFW acclimated and released approximately 10,000 hatchery steelhead smolts at the Skunk Creek acclimation site. The net pen at the Brockman Gulch acclimation site needed repairs so no releases occurred from Brockman Gulch in 2025.

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 2024 and were valid from December 1, 2024 through April 30, 2025. ODFW conducted a series of outreach activities to licensing agents, Oregon State Marine Board, and angler groups to educate them on license requirements.
- **Action IV.B.2**: In the 2024-2025 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 were 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. See page 86 of the RSP for more information about conservation status triggers and how they apply to the winter steelhead fishery. Wild winter steelhead harvest was limited to 1-per-day and 1-per-season from the mouth of the Rogue River to the confluence with the Illinois River. No wild winter steelhead harvest was allowed upstream of that point on the Rogue or Illinois rivers.

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 2025 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 2025. High flows and turbid water limited surveys during the peak of winter steelhead spawning. As a result, redd counts were incomplete and spawner abundance could not be determined. 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 full spawner abundance estimates, but minimum abundance estimates from partial redd counts indicated that harvest rates were below plan limits in all populations.
- **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. 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 2025, including surveys in the mainstem Rogue River and several major tributaries, to estimate winter steelhead spawner abundance. Spawner abundance was lower than

in the previous two years, as expected based on the historical relationship between half-pounder counts and subsequent adult steelhead returns used to develop conservation status criteria in the RSP. Wild winter steelhead harvest was calculated using data from the new *Rogue-South Coast Wild Steelhead Harvest Tag*. Due to the harvest restrictions in place for the 2024-25 season, the wild steelhead harvest rate was very low (see *Wild Fish Monitoring Summaries*).

- **Action V.B.4**: A resistance board weir was constructed on Little Butte Creek during the spring of 2022 and 2023 with the purpose of evaluating pHOS and run-timing of summer and winter steelhead. High water events damaged the weir during both years, rendering it inoperable for several weeks. During a high-water event in 2023 the trap box and fyke were damaged beyond repair. No fish were caught in the weir over the two seasons of attempted operation. This strategy is being abandoned while other methods or locations are being identified.
- **Action V.B.7**: For the fifth 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 similar to the previous year 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 aggregate abundance estimate was higher than recent years, which was not consistent with results for the Upper Rogue population. Due to the harvest restrictions in place for the 2024-25 season, the estimated wild winter steelhead harvest rate was very low (see *Wild Fish Monitoring Summaries*).
- **Action V.B.9:** For the fourth 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.B.4:** Rogue District staff partnered with OSP to operate a booth at the Jackson County Sportsman's Show.
- **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**: Rogue District staff served as instructors at multiple *Salmon Watch* events in Jackson and Josephine Counties. These events taught elementary and middle school students about riparian vegetation, macroinvertebrates, and salmon anatomy.

- **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 the end of the winter steelhead season and early run summer steelhead anglers**.** This cooperative effort has provided multiple opportunities for ODFW and OSP to answer angler and guide questions about RSP validations and tags. Compliance with the new licensing requirements seems to be improving.
- **Action VI.H.1**: The 2025 RSP Annual Report was completed and posted in December 2025.

VII. Facilities Actions

- **VII.A.1:** Cole Rivers Hatchery had several infrastructure improvements in 2025. The roofs were replaced on multiple buildings including the hatch house, main office, spawning building, and shop.
- **VII.A.2:** Material was purchased to repair the winter steelhead smolt acclimation net-pen used at the Brockman Gulch/Jump Off Joe Creek.
- **VII.B.1:** A lot of time was spent responding to poor behavior at multiple river access sites. Boulders and cement blocks were used to block unauthorized off-road travel while maintaining public access.
- **VII.B:** ODFW worked with Curry Watershed Partnership to improve angler access sites on Sixes and Elk River.

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 2025 include the following:

- District staff continue to develop recommendations to adapt hatchery production shortfalls 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 US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and coordinate on facility renovations and implementation.

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. ODFW and other partners worked towards fund raising, designing, and permitting several fish passage and habitat improvement projects planned for implementation in 2026. Planning for spawning gravel restoration and augmentation continues and resources dedicated to streamflow restoration have increased.

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 four of the plan. ODFW will continue to refine monitoring methods based on lessons learned. Wild half pounder returns decreased

after a year with higher counts, but no changes to interim winter steelhead harvest regulations will be required for the Rogue in the 2025-2026 season. Other measurable criteria for fish populations covered by the plan are generally well above conservation status levels, with the exception of Elk River coho salmon, which had a very poor return in 2023 but bounced back with a stronger return in 2024.

Outreach continues to be a very important and time-consuming aspect of plan implementation. Creel surveys have been one of the best additions for informing the public about the RSP, licensing requirements, enforcement, and how funds from the new winter steelhead validation and harvest tag are being used.