

**ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT FOR 2008
 ROGUE RIVER SPRING CHINOOK SALMON CONSERVATION PLAN
 ROGUE WATERSHED DISTRICT
 OREGON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE**

INTRODUCTION

In September of 2007, the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission formally adopted a conservation plan for spring Chinook salmon in the Rogue Species Management Unit (SMU). This plan calls for the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) to complete annual reports that will include, at least, the following elements: (1) SMU status in relation to the desired status and conservation status statements embedded in the conservation plan, (2) summaries of annual efforts to monitor SMU attributes, (3) implications of any research or evaluation projects completed during the reporting year, (4) any updated assessments of population attributes completed during the reporting year, and (5) presentation of the rationale associated with any changes in management actions made during the reporting year.

This document is the second annual report to be completed. A copy of the conservation plan is available on the ODFW website at the following address:

http://www.dfw.state.or.us/fish/nfcp/rogue_river/

SUMMARY OF SMU STATUS

Table 1. Comparisons of singular elements of current and desired status for naturally produced spring Chinook salmon in the Rogue Spring Chinook Salmon Species Management Unit. Desired status elements are described in the conservation plan, and the plan also called for the description of current status based on average values noted during the previous ten years (where available).

Status Element	Desired Status	Current Status	2008 Estimate
Abundance (at Gold Ray Dam)	≥15,000	7,624 (1999-2008)	3,970
Migration Timing ^a (% passage by 15 June)	≥60%	46% (2003-2008)	49%
Age Structure (% jacks)	≤10%	12% (2003-2008)	39%
September Spawner Distribution ^b (% above Shady Cove)	≥40%	62% (2004-2008)	65%
Spawner Composition (% hatchery)	≤15%	15% (2004-2008)	17%

^a For only those fish at least 24 inches in length (“adults”).

^b This element only covers September spawners because October spawners cannot be distinguished from fall Chinook salmon that spawn in overlapping areas.

Table 2. Status of the Rogue Spring Chinook Salmon Species Management Unit as compared to adopted conservation criteria. Conservation criteria are based on a three year running average, except where noted.

Status Element	Conservation Criterion	Conservation Status
Abundance ^a (at Gold Ray Dam)	<3,500	3,970 (2008)
Abundance (at Gold Ray Dam)	<5,000	4,063 (2006-2008)
Migration Timing ^b (% passage by 15 June)	<30%	44% (2006-2008)
Age Structure (% jacks)	>25%	20% (2006-2008)
September Spawner Distribution ^c (% above Shady Cove)	<30%	68% (2006-2008)
Spawner Composition ^d (% hatchery)	>25%	19% (2007-2008)

^a *During any single year.*

^b *For only those fish at least 24 inches in length (“adults”).*

^c *This element only covers September spawners because October spawners cannot be distinguished from fall Chinook salmon that spawn in overlapping areas.*

^d *Average during two consecutive years.*

MONITORING RESULTS

Monitoring of SMU attributes is designed to produce metrics that are to be used to characterize the current status of the SMU. All monitoring needed to update SMU status was completed by ODFW in 2008, and the results are included in Table 1 and Table 2. Monitoring results that most differed in 2008, as compared to previous years, included (1) a near-record low passage of wild adults (not jacks) that passed the counting station at Gold Ray Dam, (2) a marked increase in the proportion of jacks among wild fish that passed Gold Ray Dam, and (3) the largest return of mini-jacks since 1987.

COMPLETED MANAGEMENT ACTIONS

The Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission adopted Alternative 9, outlined in the conservation plan, as the preferred suite of management strategies to be employed by ODFW. Some of the actions outlined in Alternative 9 were completed during 2008, and are listed below. Also listed are actions completed in 2007 for which no further work is needed.

Management Strategy 9.1

1. Most of the action items within this management strategy relate to seasonal operations of Lost Creek Lake by the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). ODFW worked cooperatively with the USACE during 2008 to identify and implement reservoir release

strategies designed to enhance naturally produced spring Chinook salmon (Actions 1.1, 1.2, 1.4, 1.5, 1.6, 1.7, 1.9, and 1.12 in the conservation plan).

2. ODFW submitted letters of support for two grant applications submitted by Jackson County for preliminary studies associated with the review and potential removal of Gold Ray Dam. ODFW also participated in an interagency group providing advice on the removal of Savage Rapids Dam, and submitted comments designed to ensure successful upstream passage of adult spring Chinook salmon during critical work periods at the dam (Actions 1.13 and 1.14 in the conservation plan).

3. ODFW published a newspaper insert to distribute information on local populations of fish and wildlife and how ODFW manages the various species. The insert included a focus on the benefits of riparian habitat (Action 1.15 in the conservation plan).

4. ODFW completed work on conservation plan actions 1.3, 1.8, 1.10, and 1.11 in 2007.

Management Strategy 9.4

1. New regulations for the freshwater fishery, as called for in the conservation plan, began in 2008 (Action 4.1 in the conservation plan).

2. When it became apparent that the 2008 return of wild fish was going to result in the SMU falling below conservation status (outlined in the conservation plan), ODFW adopted regulations to close the 2008 fishery for wild fish. The purpose of the early fishery closure was to increase the numbers of naturally spawning wild fish. Relevant conservation criteria, which trigger modification of management strategies, include (1) at least 3,500 wild fish should pass Gold Ray Dam each year and (2) at least 5,000 wild fish should pass Gold Ray Dam during any three successive years. ODFW used these criteria as a management guideline to close the river fisheries to the harvest of wild fish.

3. ODFW worked with the Oregon State Police (OSP) to develop action plans under the Cooperative Enforcement Program for enforcement during the 2008 fisheries on both the middle and upper Rogue River (Action 4.4 in the conservation plan).

4. ODFW completed work on conservation plan actions 4.3 and 4.6 in 2007. These actions are designed to be completed annually.

Management Strategy 9.5

1. ODFW designed and installed a temporary barrier weir at the primary outflow channel at Cole Rivers Hatchery in June and removed the weir in September (Action 5.1 in the conservation plan).

2. ODFW completed work on conservation plan action 5.2 in 2007.

OTHER

While no research projects began in 2008, some work was completed during the year to lay the groundwork for the initiation of formal research or habitat improvement projects in future years. Discussion of completed work follows.

1. ODFW collected scales from naturally spawning hatchery fish marked with coded-wire tags. Scales from natural spawners of known ages are needed to build a reference collection so that analysts can accurately age scales taken from naturally spawning wild fish. ODFW projects that one more year of scale collections will be needed to obtain the appropriate number of scales needed for a training collection. In addition, ODFW collected representative scale samples and lengths from about 330 naturally spawning wild fish, and also estimated the lengths of wild fish that passed Gold Ray Dam. These data will be needed to generate pre-season forecasts of the freshwater return of wild fish (Research Need 1. in the conservation plan).

2. ODFW, with assistance from the USACE, completed a pilot project to determine the feasibility of executing a coordinated research project outlined in the conservation plan (see Research Needs 4. and 5.). Results from the pilot project will be used to (1) estimate the number of fish that need to be tagged during the formal research project and (2) finalize methods designed to capture and tag fish near the mouth of the Rogue River. Results from this pilot project will be completed in 2009.

3. ODFW completed extended spawning surveys in the mainstem of the Rogue River between Cole M. Rivers Hatchery and Dodge Bridge (Research Need 3. in the conservation plan) with funds allocated by the Restoration and Enhancement Board. Data resulting from these extended surveys will be needed in the event that Gold Ray Dam is removed, with a resultant loss of the allied fish counting station. In order to appropriately interpret results of the extended spawning surveys, a research project outlined in the conservation plan (see Research Needs 4. and 5.) needs to be completed in order to determine whether fall Chinook salmon are also spawning in this area.

4. ODFW completed spawning surveys in Big Butte Creek with funds allocated by the Restoration and Enhancement Board. These surveys were designed to determine how to optimize upstream passage and spawner distribution (Actions 2.21 and 2.22 in the conservation plan) and to provide guidance in relation to enhancement of spawning habitat (Action 2.23 in the conservation plan). Results from this project will be completed in 2009.