

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

2022 Annual Report

**Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife
November 2022**

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 5

V. Research and Monitoring Actions 6

VI. Outreach/Enforcement Actions..... 7

VII. Facilities Actions 8

Evaluation and Adaptive Management 8

Other 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 2022 annual report summarizes RSP implementation since plan approval 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 (2021)	65,799	≥ 80,000	72,212	< 40,000
Coastal Stratum Juvenile Site Occupancy (2021)	96%	≥ 90%	99%	< 75%
Huntley Wild Half-Pounder Count (2022)	953	≥ 1,000	910	< 300
Summer Steelhead				
Huntley Wild Late-run Summer Steelhead (2022)	8,482	≥ 11,000	7,403	< 3,250
Coho Salmon				
Elk River Spawner Abundance Index (2021)	192	≥ 800	229	< 150
Huntley Wild Adult Coho Abundance (2021)	5,503	≥ 10,000	5,409	< 1,870
Cutthroat Trout				
Coastal Stratum Abundance Index (2021)	31,897	≥ 28,000	21,293	< 6,500
Coastal Stratum Site Occupancy (2021)	96%	≥ 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 December 2021–October 2022. 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 2022 are included in the highlights below.

I. Habitat Actions

- **Action I.B.1:** An extensive amount of time and district resources were allocated to submitting projects for drought package funds allocated by the legislature, for infrastructure funding, and for the developing the Rogue Watershed Resiliency Initiative. Several barriers on the statewide priority list are included, along with other district priorities.
- **Action I.B.1:** Fish passage restoration was completed on mainstem Salt Creek (Little Butte Creek) in 2022 with the removal of two push up dams on the statewide priority list and funding from ODFW’s Fish Restoration and Enhancement Program (Rogue River Watershed Council project).
- **Action I.B.1:** ODFW organized initial meetings to develop a passage project at Laurel Hill Dam on Williams Creek (Applegate River). Two previous projects failed to remove the dam. Participants included the Applegate Watershed Council, Water Watch, Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and ODFW Fish Passage Program staff. Also coordinated with NOAA-Fisheries and the ditch association. Work on a project is continuing. District staff also continue to assist with the project at nearby Watts Toppin dam on Williams Creek, where the design of a roughened channel is nearing completion. Both dams are on the statewide priority list.
- **Action I.B.1:** In related action, ODFW worked with Oregon State Police (OSP) to remove illegal dams on West Evans Creek and Bear Creek. Dams on Bear Creek were being used to trap and kill adult fall chinook migrating upstream to spawn.
- **Action I.B.4:** ODFW continued to monitor conditions for passage in the vicinity of the abandoned sewer line on Bear Creek in downtown Medford. Sandbagging was completed to improve passage at this site, and staff worked with Rogue River Valley Irrigation to improve passage at the fish ladder upstream. Later, ODFW monitored conditions at weirs downstream due to erosion at a log weir. The good news – a WaterSMART Grant from the Bureau of Reclamation has been awarded to the Rogue Valley Council of Governments to restore fish passage at the Medford sewer line and nearby infrastructure. The permanent fix is near.
- **Action I.B.8:** Clearing in the name of fuels reduction has resulted in riparian damage in several locations, prompting ODFW efforts to minimize and repair damage. Clearing along Kitchen

Creek and Bear Creek in Ashland was the focus of discussions with Oregon Department of Land Conservation and Development (DLCD) and city planning. Replanting has not yet begun.

- **Action 1.B.10:** ODFW is working with Rogue Valley Audubon, Siskiyou Chapter Native Plant Society of Oregon, and Rogue Riverkeeper to promote riparian protection and the need for both private and public entities to follow the local riparian ordinance during work on the Bear Creek Greenway. Multiple plans for work along the greenway are being developed concurrently, and all include proposals for various levels of vegetation management. People who care about fish and wildlife resources are being encouraged to participate in related surveys and the planning process. Clearing in riparian habitat will also affect beavers and Action 1.C.5, as well as actions to combat non-native minnows and Action 11.D.1.
- **Action 1.B.10:** A Rogue District Update focused on the value of riparian vegetation, riparian process, and the rules that protect riparian areas was distributed. In addition, ODFW posted links to local riparian ordinances on the Rogue webpage to facilitate public involvement in riparian protection and public oversight of implementation of the riparian ordinance by local governments.
- **Action 1.B.10:** Staff participated in Medford's Climate Change Adaptation and Resiliency Plan, providing information on primary limiting factors, the RSP and associated climate projections, and the importance of a healthy, multistory canopy of riparian vegetation for salmon and steelhead.
- **Action 1.B.11:** ODFW worked with OSP, Oregon Department of State Lands (DSL), and US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) to enforce fill and removal laws for Hunter Creek estuary to protect off channel and floodplain habitat.
- **Action 1.C.1:** The purchase of water rights for the Little Butte Mill in Eagle Point was completed. The Butte Creek Mill Foundation will still be able to do a non-consumptive diversion for mill use with some of the right, while Oregon Water Resources Department (OWRD) approved a permanent instream transfer for 6-8.4 cfs. The purchase, coordinated by Trout Unlimited, was funded in part by the ODFW Fish Restoration and Enhancement Program and OWRD, and was supported by the district. This is an exciting development for Little Butte Creek on the upper Rogue, continuing a string of restoration investment dating back to early Oregon Plan days. An instream lease by Trout Unlimited helped ensure flow in Little Butte Creek in this drought year.
- **Action 1.C.1:** The Rogue District supported an Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB) stakeholder engagement grant application submitted by Trout Unlimited to fund personnel to promote and facilitate instream purchases and leases. With funding, work should begin in 2023.
- **Action 1.C.14:** ODFW joined with a local community group to advocate for riparian protection of seeps and springs that contribute cooler flow into Bear Creek in Phoenix. ODFW has been monitoring several sites and implemented a riparian outreach project on one (STEP). While these sites are not yet included among the streams listed for protection in the Phoenix ordinance,

at least the city planning department developed a protocol for enforcing violations of the ordinance beginning in 2022.

- **Action I.C.22:** ODFW continues to coordinate with a group of agencies monitoring post-urban fire water quality. Monitoring for the tire chemical associated with mortality in coho salmon has been added.
- **Action I.D.2:** A lot of time was spent assisting the Rogue River Watershed Council with a grant application for NOAA-Fisheries funding for projects in support of the Coho Strategic Action Plan (SAP) in the upper Rogue. Many projects tie directly into the Rogue Watershed Resiliency initiative.

II. Other Species Actions

- **Action II.B.1:** ODFW Marine Research Program identified all seal scat collected in the Rogue from 1995–2022. Data will be summarized and published. Scat was collected from Pistol River estuary in spring 2022 to be combined with samples collected from 2018–2022.
- **Action II.D.1:** In 2022, ODFW continued an annual pikeminnow “roundup” in the Rogue Basin, encouraging angler harvest of non-native Umpqua Pikeminnow with a raffle, gift cards, and other outreach.

III. Hatchery Actions

- **Action III.D.1:** In fall 2022, approximately 25,000 Chetco winter steelhead hatchery smolts were coded wire tagged for release in the spring of 2023. These will assist in monitoring straying, ocean distribution, and evaluating any future acclimation site.
- **Action III.D.4:** In spring 2022, 15,000 winter steelhead smolts were acclimated and released from a new acclimation site in a tributary of Jump Off Joe Creek.
- **Action III.D.5:** ODFW conducted spawning ground surveys near smolt acclimation sites in the Middle Rogue in 2022 to monitor the presence of hatchery steelhead on the spawning grounds. Two surveys were conducted on Jump Off Joe Creek and Quartz Creek with no steelhead observations. Work continues on a plan to acquire more observations.

IV. Fishing Actions

- **Action IV.B.1:** During the 2022 legislative session, the Oregon state legislature passed Senate Bill 4072, which updated the fee schedule for ODFW licenses, tags, and permits. The updates included the two new fishing authorizations identified in the RSP (Rogue-South Coast Steelhead Validation and Rogue-South Coast Wild Steelhead Harvest Tag) and their associated fees, which allows the new authorizations to be sold starting January 1, 2023. To implement the new validation and harvest tag in 2023, ODFW staff made necessary updates to relevant Oregon Administrative Rules (OARs), Oregon Sport Fishing Regulations, and the Electronic Licensing

System (ELS). Rule changes were adopted by the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission in August 2022.

- **Action IV.B.2:** Oregon Sport Fishing Regulations for 2023 were updated to be consistent with interim regulations described in the RSP.

V. Research and Monitoring Actions

Tables 18 and 19 of the RSP provides 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. During this report period, ODFW shifted monitoring capacity from other locations in western Oregon into the Rogue–South Coast in order to implement critical monitoring called for in the plan. The RSP also identified research actions to address critical uncertainties relative to each SMU (Table 20). Research and monitoring developments in 2022 include 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 2022. Survey observations were used to estimate wild winter steelhead spawner abundance in each population, and harvest rates were determined using ELS harvest estimates (**Action V.A.5**). Estimated wild steelhead harvest rates were below plan limits for all six populations (see *Wild Fish Monitoring Summaries*).
- **Actions V.A.3, V.C.1:** Multiple 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 (see *Wild Fish Monitoring Summaries*). ODFW will use snorkel surveys for pHOS monitoring in other Coastal Stratum populations as time and resources allow.
- **Action V.B.3:** ODFW initiated new winter steelhead spawning surveys in the Upper Rogue population area in 2022, including surveys in the mainstem Rogue River and several major tributaries. In all, 26 sites covering 37 miles of spawning habitat were surveyed. Based on experience gained in 2022 and increased monitoring staff capacity now in place, ODFW expects to successfully estimate Upper Rogue winter steelhead spawner abundance in future years.
- **Action V.B.7:** For the second consecutive year, ODFW conducted a statistical 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). This information was used to estimate wild winter steelhead abundance and harvest rate for Rogue Stratum populations in aggregate. The estimated wild winter steelhead harvest rate was below the plan limit (see *Wild Fish Monitoring Summaries*).

Creel surveys were also conducted on the lower Applegate River to monitor the proportion of wild and hatchery steelhead caught and track wild winter steelhead abundance in the Applegate River portion of the Middle Rogue/Applegate population.

- **Action V.B.9:** ODFW selected index sites in core juvenile coho salmon rearing areas and conducted snorkel surveys at these sites in summer 2022 to monitor coho salmon abundance and site occupancy. Sites with previous sampling by the ODFW Aquatic Inventories Project (AQI) were prioritized when selecting index sites.
- **Action V.D.3:** ODFW continued collaboration with staff at the State Fisheries Genomics Lab to evaluate the relationship between genetic run-timing markers and steelhead life history patterns in the Rogue basin. A journal manuscript describing initial results of this work has been submitted for publication.
- **Action V.D.6:** ODFW implemented a pilot project for monitoring early-run summer steelhead by distributing log books to guides and anglers fishing for summer steelhead in the Upper Rogue from June-September.

VI. Outreach/Enforcement Actions

- **Action VI.A.1:** A video on proper catch and release techniques was developed and the link distributed during the spring chinook fishery. This video applies to other fisheries as well. In addition, ODFW staff discussed proper catch and release techniques at a Middle Rogue Steelheaders meeting.
- **Action VI.A.2:** With below average releases from Lost Creek Reservoir, flows in the mainstem Rogue River below the dam reached very low levels while a higher proportion of winter steelhead were spawning in the upper Rogue mainstem. ODFW issued a news release in late March 2022 asking the public to avoid disturbing spawning fish and redds in the shallow riffles and tailouts of the upper Rogue. ODFW also worked with DSL to prevent dredging of gravel bars in the upper Rogue, both intended and unintended. There are no permits for dredging for navigation in this area. ODFW reached out to the Oregon State Marine Board, marine deputies and Oregon State Parks, as well as asking guides to report illegal activity.
- **Action VI.D.4:** A new harvest location code for the Chetco River above Nook Creek was created and will go into effect in 2023.
- **Action VI.E.3:** ODFW partnered 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.H.1:** ODFW developed *Wild Fish Monitoring Summaries* and *Hatchery Program Summaries* that will be posted to the RSP website as part of annual reporting.
- **Action VI.F.1:** ODFW, OSP, and the US Coast Guard conducted angler creel and enforcement of the Rogue estuary coho fishery in September and October 2022.

VII. Facilities Actions

- **Action VII.A.1:** Extensive time was spent responding to ongoing infrastructure problems at Cole Rivers Hatchery and working with local counties, the Coquille Indian Tribe, and US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) to acquire funds for needed repairs. Problems associated with a powerline failure continue for the second year. Repairs may be completed by spring 2023.
- **Action VII.B.2:** Submitted comments in support of boat ramp improvements by Josephine County Parks at Chinook Park and recruited additional comments among guides and the Middle Rogue Steelheaders.

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 2022 include the following:

- Adaptive management was employed with summer steelhead and spring chinook production groups at Cole Rivers Hatchery due to the powerline failure. The hatchery will not be able to meet size at release targets for these groups. District staff proposed alternate rearing strategies to maximize returns and minimize impacts to naturally produced fish, coordinating with NOAA-Fisheries, USACE, and ODFW Fish Propagation staff.
- ODFW worked with all new staff at USACE to successfully manage one of the most challenging fill seasons on record for Rogue reservoirs. The Rogue District hosted new USACE leadership for a “meet and greet” and a Rogue 101 session. Communication was extensive. Lost Creek releases during the fill season were managed carefully to protect spring chinook redds and newly emerged fry while still trying to fill the reservoir, and the level of storage resulted in river flows below the dam nearing or exceeding record low levels for the time of year. Additional work was done to protect winter steelhead redds due to higher-than-normal mainstem spawning.
- ODFW worked with USACE to store water in Applegate Reservoir prior to the official fill season, adaptively managing due to drought. As of January 12, 2022 Applegate Reservoir was nearly 17 feet above the normal flood control pool level. ODFW requested that as much of this water be stored as possible (Lost Creek Reservoir is well below normal). By the start of the fill season on February 1 the Corps had kept almost 9 feet of additional water in Applegate Reservoir (approximately 3,200 acre feet). Applegate Reservoir did not fill in spring 2022, so this additional water contributed to critical summer releases for wild coho salmon and steelhead.

Other

- Rogue staff worked with the Water Program in ODFW’s Habitat Division to develop the Rogue Watershed Resiliency Initiative as one of ODFW’s focal areas for infrastructure funding. Most of the work has been focused on partners in the upper Rogue to date: Medford Water Commission,

Trout Unlimited, Water Watch and the Rogue River Watershed Council. ODFW is also working with Josephine County Public Works to begin work on projects that improve fish passage and benefit road design and longevity.

- District staff and a volunteer conducted the annual summer fish distribution check on Bear Cr. During the multiyear drought of the 1990s, a survey one summer found no native fish in locations checked in the lower 12-13 miles of the stream. Despite severe drought and hot weather in 2022, native fish were found in all locations sampled in 2022, including one site near river mile 10 and one at river mile 2.

Summary

Transition best describes the annual report period, as ODFW made changes needed to implement the RSP while also addressing unique challenges and opportunities like protecting fish during another drought year, protecting fish and habitat from impacts of illegal cannabis cultivation, and developing projects to take advantage of new funding opportunities. Monitoring capacity has increased significantly with a new project biologist and two year-round biological science assistants in the Upper Rogue District and several new seasonal positions in the South Coast District. In addition, a Western Oregon Stream Restoration Program biologist position in the Rogue was restored in 2022, which will enhance ODFW's capacity to implement the habitat strategies and actions in the RSP. Fish populations covered by the plan are generally below desired status levels, but remain above levels that trigger conservation concern or fishery management changes. This report describes just some of the work being done to produce more wild fish; work that will pay off in improved returns and improved resilience.