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SALMON & TROUT ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM

2024-2025 Annual Progress Report

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Background and Summary

This report summarizes the activities and accomplishments of the Salmon and Trout Enhancement Program (STEP) from October 1, 2024, to September 30, 2025. The Oregon Legislature established STEP in 1981 as a program of the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) that seeks to "achieve the recovery and sustainability of the state's native salmon and trout through the education of Oregon's citizens and their involvement with fish management efforts". Although this goal will not be achieved by the program acting alone, annual volunteer efforts through STEP to enhance fisheries and restore habitats lend critical support to the management programs of ODFW and contribute to the more extensive statewide efforts toward fish and watershed restoration under the Oregon Plan for Salmon and Watersheds.

The role of STEP within ODFW is defined by Oregon Revised Statute (ORS 496.430 through 496.465) and Oregon Administrative Rule (OAR 635-009-0090 through 635-009-0120) specific to the program. Program activities are also guided by broader ODFW fish and habitat management policies including the Native Fish Conservation Policy, Fish Hatchery Management Policy, and the Fish Health Management Policy. These policies establish direction for the broader ODFW fish and habitat management efforts that include STEP, provide support for a wide range of STEP activities, and set biological impact thresholds. The policies also allow STEP to work with other ODFW programs for which STEP can provide important volunteer and educational support.

The types of projects conducted through STEP reflect the diverse ways that volunteers can assist with fish and habitat management needs throughout Oregon. The issues and priorities within individual watersheds are often unique to those areas and the focus of STEP efforts can vary across the state. Generally, activities can be grouped into four main categories:

- **Education and Program Development** inform the public about the STEP Program, Oregon's salmon and trout resources, and their habitats. Projects include classroom incubators (also known as the "Fish Eggs-to-Fry Program"), presentations, classes, volunteer training, tours, displays, printed materials, equipment, construction, and maintenance.

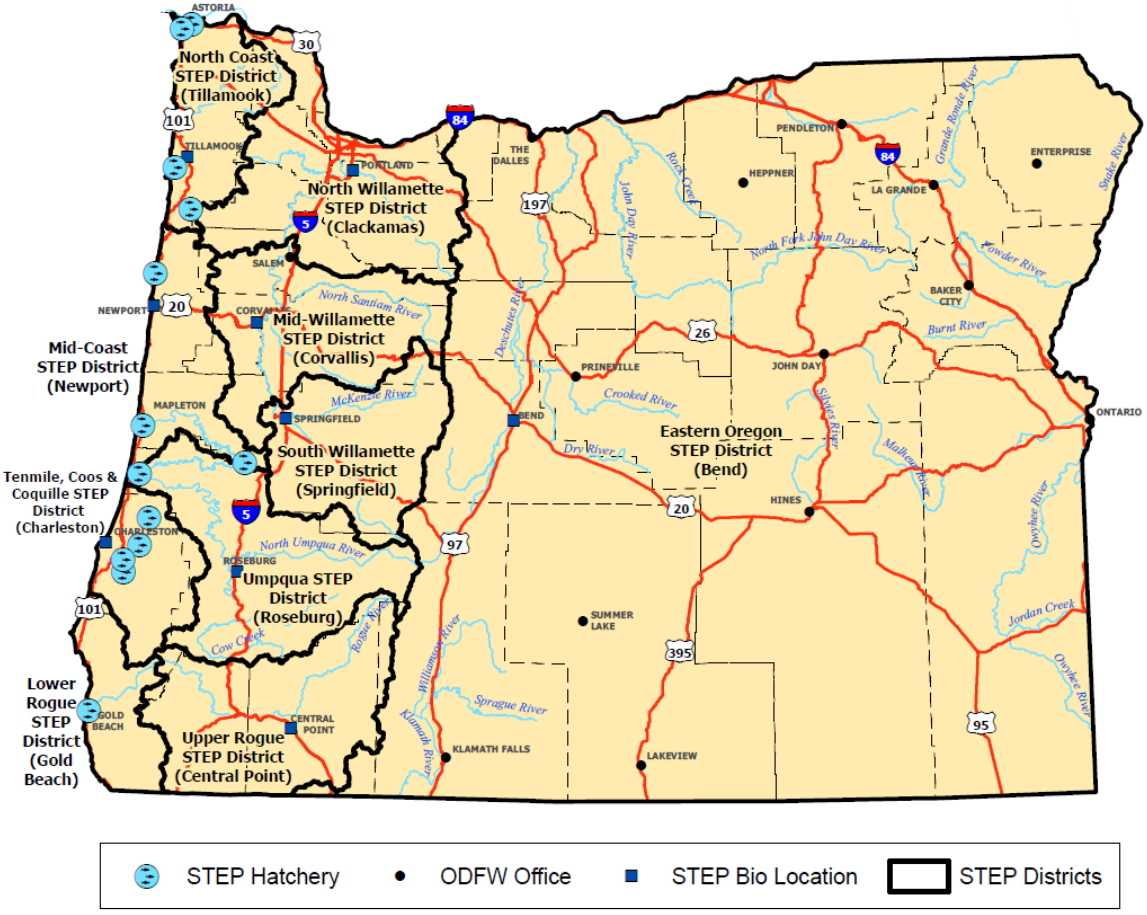
- **Inventory and Monitoring activities** characterize fish populations and their habitats. Projects include stream and riparian habitat surveys, and other methods used to study, monitor or inventory fish life history, presence, distribution, or abundance.

- **Habitat Improvement activities** enhance, restore, and protect habitat for native stocks of salmon, steelhead, and trout. Projects include the placement of large woody debris in streams, riparian protection and restoration, fish passage improvement and fish carcass placement for stream nutrient enrichment. This category also includes aesthetic improvements to lakes and streams achieved through the Keep Oregon's Rivers Clean (KORC) fishing line and tackle recycling program.

- **Fish Culture activities** produce fish to supplement natural fish production, augment fisheries, or, in the case of the classroom egg incubation program, provide educational opportunities. This category also includes fish rescued, transplanted, or reintroduced.

•**Fishing Access and Opportunity** - The 25-year Angling Enhancement Plan was adopted in February of 2010 to outline strategies for providing diverse, stable, and productive angling opportunities and facilitate an increase in angling participation. Because of its strong connection to the volunteer base, and the local needs and interests, STEP is used to directly address recreational fishing priorities; specifically, opportunity, access, and mentoring. While the focus is on youth anglers and families it also provides direct and indirect benefits to all anglers.

STEP is funded by a combination of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Sport Fish Restoration (SFR) grant program and ODFW funds (75 percent federal with 25 percent state match). The program consists of a coordinator and administrative assistant, located in the ODFW headquarters office in Salem, and 10 STEP biologists located around the state. The program coordinator and the administrative assistant divide their time between the STEP program and the Restoration and Enhancement Program. STEP is implemented in the field by ten staff located throughout the state who spend either all or part of their time serving as a STEP Biologist (SFR funds the equivalent of 10.17 full-time employees, eight staff are fully funded by SFR and five are partially funded). The map below shows each STEP district, along with the locations of 14 STEP hatcheries in Oregon.



In addition, program oversight is provided by the nine-member STEP Advisory Committee (STAC) comprised of citizens appointed by the Governor. The committee advises the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission (Commission) and ODFW on policy and the implementation of STEP. The committee also administers the STAC Mini-Grant Program, funded through a $50,000 biennial grant from the ODFW Fish Restoration and Enhancement (R&E) Program. Mini-Grants are available in amounts up to $2,000 for projects that further the goals of STEP and are reviewed for approval by STAC at their meetings. From October 2024 to September 2025, two in-person STAC meetings were held at various locations across the state.

Within each watershed management district, the STEP biologist fills several roles including fish and habitat biologist, educator, outreach specialist, community or technical advisor, and lead for volunteer management. The program works with a variety of individuals, groups and organizations including adult and youth volunteers, angling and conservation interests, watershed councils, soil and water conservation districts, private landowners, schools, individual students, and other state, federal and local government agencies. Through STEP, these individuals and organizations work with ODFW to conduct community-based watershed restoration and species recovery efforts throughout Oregon.

INTRODUCTION

STEP biologists and volunteers conduct a variety of activities that help develop the program and educate the public about Oregon's fish resources. These include:

- Presentations to groups, teaching classes, conducting tours, and holding workshops.
- Hosting displays or booths at fairs and festivals, and preparing written materials such as articles, news releases, websites, brochures, and STEP publications.
- Training STEP volunteers or project cooperators with technical skills that allow them to conduct or assist with projects.
- Maintaining or constructing equipment or facilities.
- Assisting with program administration and other activities.
- Providing digital content including livestreams and videos.
- Volunteers assist ODFW in conducting a variety of inventory, monitoring, and evaluation projects to provide information on Oregon's salmon, steelhead and trout, their habitats, and associated fisheries.

The major types of activities conducted through STEP are:

- Angler or creel surveys.
- Fish passage or culvert inspections.
- Fish population or distribution survey or monitoring.
- Fish life history or other investigations.
- Stream and other aquatic habitat surveys.
- Miscellaneous monitoring activities (e.g., water quality monitoring)

To conduct these surveys, volunteers become skilled in sampling methods and learn a wide variety of fish or fishery sampling techniques, including adult and juvenile fish traps, electro- fishing gear, seines, gill nets, trap nets, snorkeling, hook and line, radio telemetry, and creel surveys.

Each year, volunteers conduct or assist with numerous habitat improvement projects on private and public lands throughout Oregon. These include efforts to improve or restore:

- Fish passage.
- In-stream habitat.
- Riparian, off-channel, wetland, or floodplain habitat.
- Stream nutrient enrichment through fish carcass placement.
- Aesthetic qualities through the Keep Oregon's Rivers Clean program.

The stream nutrient enrichment program and many carcass placement projects rely heavily on the manual labor of STEP volunteers, as access to sites can be poor and carcasses must be placed in a manner that

simulates natural distribution and conditions. Carcass placement occurs in streams where populations of spawning anadromous salmonids are well below historic levels.

STEP is in a unique position in that it can bring all aspects of restoration under one program. These include pre and post project monitoring, technical guidance, equipment, labor, outreach, and access to funding.

The Keep Oregon's Rivers Clean (KORC) program was created to collect and recycle discarded fishing line and tackle. Currently, over 100 stations have been installed and are being maintained by volunteers within the fish districts.

In several locations where there are no ODFW hatchery programs due to lack of facilities or hatchery capacity, STEP volunteers operate facilities that perform the entire rearing cycle from broodstock collection to release. In both cases, STEP propagation efforts are guided by ODFW management objectives, and are consistent with the guidelines, practices, and protocols outlined by hatchery management policy.

Because STEP fish culture projects are an integral part of ODFW fish management programs, oversight of STEP propagation activities occur in a variety of ways. Initially, STEP propagation proposals go through an approval process at the local, regional, and Fish Division levels within ODFW to ensure the projects will meet fish management objectives and are consistent with policies regarding potential impact to native fish populations. Specific legal limitations regarding STEP also exist to ensure that projects comply with other applicable goals, policies, rules, and plans, and limit the duration and size of projects.

STEP propagation projects operate on cycles depending on the type of project and fish species involved. Once the cycle is complete, the project must be reviewed through a formal renewal process. In addition, STEP propagation projects that rear and release more than 100,000 fish must receive authorization from the ODFW Commission. Presentation of the project at a Commission meeting also serves as an opportunity for public comment. Public comment during the propagation project review process can also be submitted directly to staff or can be provided when the project is presented for review by STAC at a regularly scheduled STAC meeting. If public interest warrants, ODFW may choose to hold additional public meetings to present and discuss projects under review.

Approved STEP projects may also benefit by not having to obtain a State issued water right for certain activities. For example, fish propagation projects approved through STEP are exempt from the requirement to have a state issued water right.

STEP biologists work closely with volunteers to ensure a facility complies with the applicable operating and reporting requirements for ODFW fish hatchery facilities and those of STEP. The program biologists also help carry out the project logistics, work with other ODFW staff to coordinate cooperative propagation efforts and provide technical assistance.

STEP fish propagation facilities are funded, built, operated, and maintained by the volunteers with ODFW assistance and oversight.

The purpose of STEP fish propagation programs is to rehabilitate or supplement populations of naturally produced salmon and trout or augment fisheries with hatchery fish. Thousands of volunteers have assisted Oregon's fisheries through their involvement in STEP and their donation of money, materials, equipment, and countless hours of time and labor. Without these efforts, ODFW's propagation ability would be greatly diminished in many areas.

Many projects have more than one single purpose and often serve as educational opportunities to increase public understanding and stewardship of Oregon's fish resources and the aquatic environment.

STEP fish culture projects are generally grouped into the following types:

- Classroom egg incubation program projects that release unfed fry, also known as the "Fish Eggs-to-Fry" program.
- In stream or stream side hatch-box projects that release unfed fry.
- Fish rearing projects. All activities included here involve feeding and caring for fish.
- Projects that acclimate fish before release.
- Projects that collect adult broodstock.
- Miscellaneous activities including volunteer help at ODFW hatcheries for maintenance, broodstock collection, spawning, marking, stocking, salvage of wild fish, and other duties.

Summary of Current Statewide Efforts

The following paragraphs summarize some key accomplishments of the program during 2024-2025:

STEP biologists hosted, directly participated in, or provided assistance to 1,510 education and outreach events around the state in the 2024-2025 reporting period (Table 1). Various outreach events that STEP personnel were involved in included Salmon Watch events, the Mayfly Festival, multiple High School career days, outdoor kid's camps, and other related natural resources events around the state. STEP Biologists hosted or directly participated in aquatic education events that included fish dissection classes, outdoor field trips, and middle school outdoor education days. ODFW STEP Biologists and program volunteers helped set up and deliver eggs to 836 fish egg to fry classroom projects across Oregon that reached approximately 38,456 students. STEP Biologists participated in 102 angler education events that included fly fishing workshops, family fishing events, summer camp fishing events, and disabled angler fishing events.

During the 2024-2025 reporting period, over 4,828 volunteers donated 57,747 hours of time to local STEP projects and activities across the state. (Table 2) This is equivalent to nearly 28 full-time employees and is valued at over $2,510,262. Of the 4,828 volunteers that donated time to the STEP program, 639 of those volunteers contributed 6111 hours on 208 projects to inventory and monitor fish populations in streams, rivers, and estuaries across the state. This included spawning ground surveys in the Nehalem and Tillamook Rivers, monitoring experimental fish releases above Applegate Dam, High Lakes trout surveys, and beach seining for juvenile salmonids in the Coos and Coquille estuaries.

STEP biologists improved 265 miles of waterways for fish use with the help of 141 volunteers through fish passage, in-stream, riparian and fish carcass placement projects and the Keep Oregon River's Clean program.

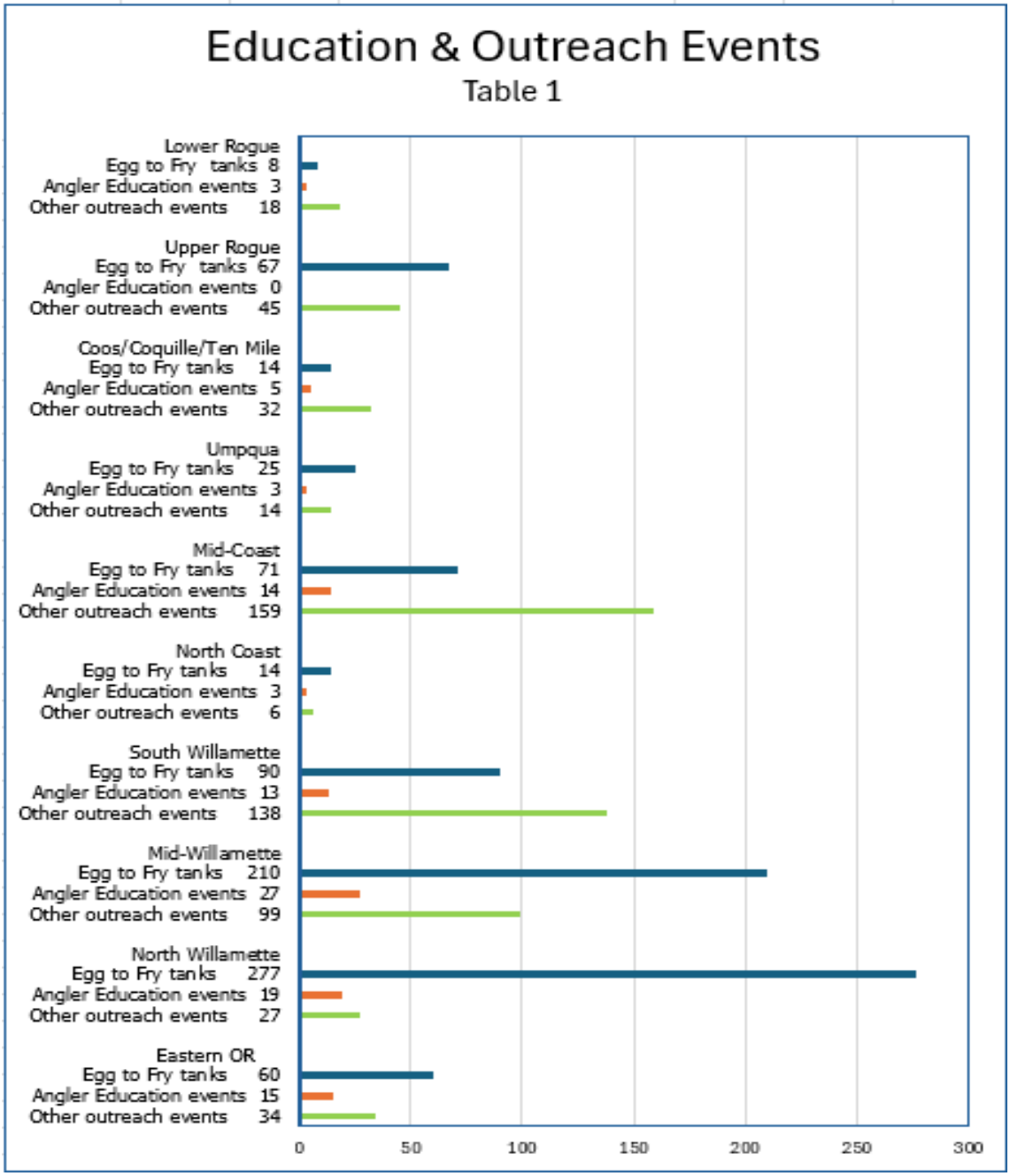
STEP volunteers assisted with releasing 3,393,691 Chinook Salmon, Coho Salmon, steelhead and trout for enhancement or augmentation purposes. Approximately 147,000 fish were released from educational classroom incubators used in the Egg to Fry program. (Table 3)

The agency continues to implement the 25-Year Angling Enhancement Plan. Major accomplishments by STEP include continuing to improve access to local angling sites, hosting or assisting with fishing events and working with educators across the state to provide educational workshops and trainings.
For this report, each STEP biologist provided a summary of activities that describe their district and an overview of activities in that district.

- The appendices include the following program information:
- Appendix 1. A list of the current STAC members
- Appendix 2. A list of the current STEP biologists

EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

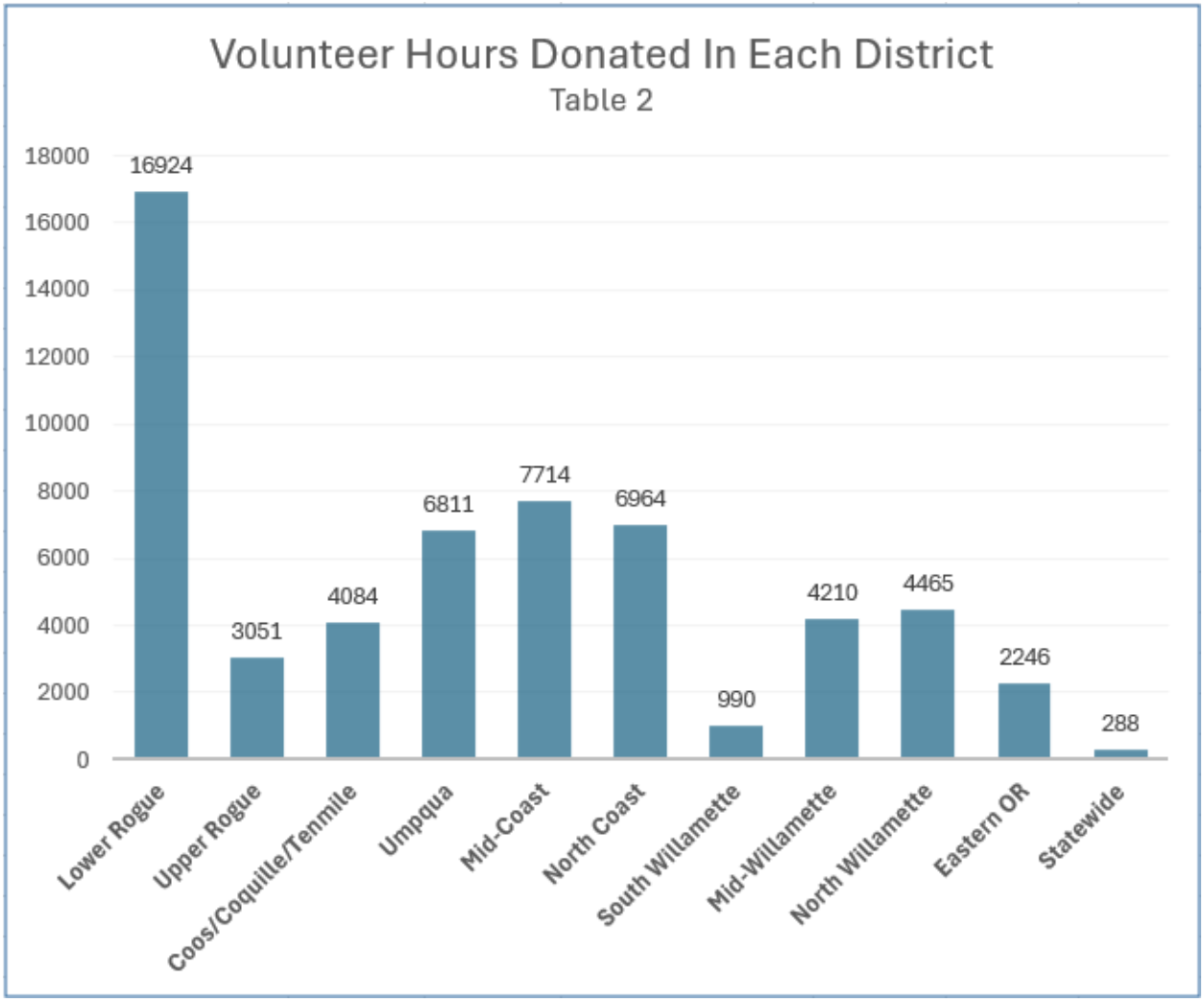
Education and Outreach activities and events are an integral part of the STEP program, and STEP Biologists across the state participated in 1,498 events which include 836 classroom incubators in the Egg to Fry program, hosting or assisting with angler education events, and participating in classroom field trips, fish dissection classes, and other public events across the state.



Number of education and outreach events by STEP District during the 2024 2025 reporting period.

VOLUNTEER HOURS DONATED

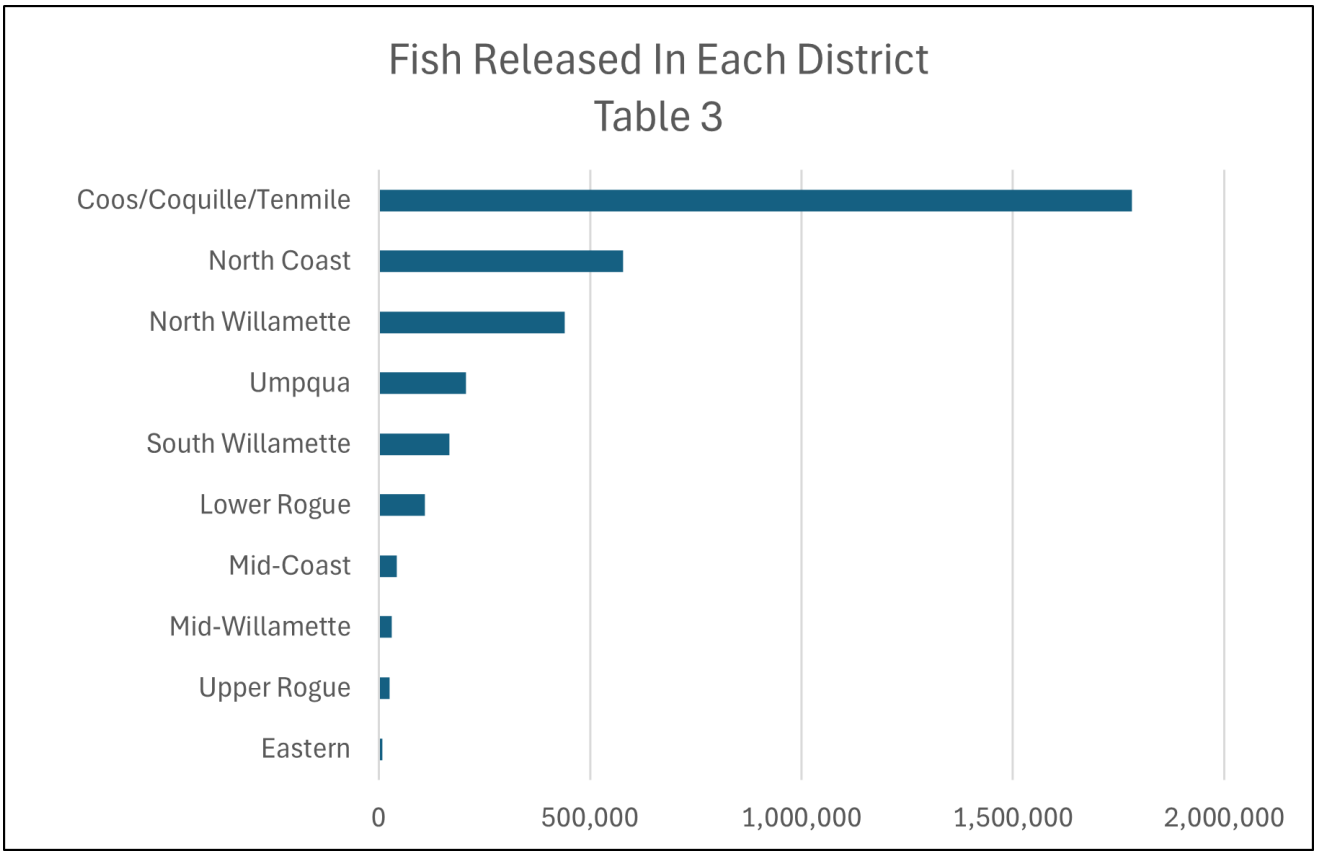
Volunteers across the state play an important role in restoring native stocks of salmon and trout, and in the 2024-2025 reporting period volunteers donated 57,747 hours of time to the STEP program. Volunteer activities included but were not limited to assisting at STEP hatcheries to collect brood stock and spawn, raise, and release fish, working with local STEP Biologists on habitat restoration projects, delivering eggs to schools for the egg to fry program, and working alongside STEP Biologists at fishing events and educational events.



Number of volunteer hours donated in each district during the 2024-2025 reporting period.

FISH CULTURE

In the 2024-2025 reporting period, STEP Biologists and volunteers in the STEP program released just under 3.4 million Chinook Salmon, coho salmon, steelhead and trout for enhancement or augmentation purposes.



Number of fish released by each STEP district during the 2024-2025 reporting period.

West Region

North Willamette STEP

Buddy Phibbs, STEP Biologist

The Lower Willamette STEP area covers the Department's North Willamette Watershed District (NWWD), and the Portland metropolitan area falls within the boundaries of this District. With a population of over 2 million people, it makes this area the most populous STEP district in Oregon. The large angling population presents the district with the challenge of meeting the varied needs of a broad and changing demographic. There are also numerous fish management constraints associated with conservation and recovery of native fish species and species listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The district mission is to provide ongoing and improving angling opportunities, improvements to habitat for fish and wildlife, and a continuing contribution to the quality of life that people in this area have come to enjoy and expect.

The district covers waters from the eastern slopes of the Coast Range east to Mt. Hood, and from the city of Clatskanie south to Salem. The larger river basins include the Columbia, Willamette, Sandy, Clackamas, Tualatin, Molalla, Yamhill, and Pudding and their many tributaries. The varied landscape includes farmland, urban areas, forestlands, mountains, and wetlands. Fish species include salmon, steelhead, trout, and sturgeon, among others. There is also a wide diversity of warm water angling opportunities with several species of warm water game fish present in the district.

Population growth along with the associated development and urban sprawl, and the ever- changing constituency continue to place considerable strain on natural resources. District staff strive to maintain a balance between fish and wildlife protections, continued opportunities for fishing, hunting, or outdoor viewing enjoyment, while meeting the new demands on the resources associated with rapid population growth and development.

Education and Program Development

Fish Eggs-to-Fry Program

The Lower Willamette STEP program has been a leader in the Fish Eggs-to-Fry program for several years and continued to see interest and growth in the classroom incubator program in 2024-2025. We had a record number of classrooms participating this year for both the rainbow trout and spring Chinook programs including 41 brand new classrooms that were added to the program. A new record 201 classrooms participated in the spring Chinook Salmon program that runs in the fall, and 76 classrooms participated in the winter rainbow trout program. These incubation projects hatched eggs and released thousands of unfed salmon and trout fry into over a dozen different STEP-approved lakes, ponds, and streams within the district. This year's spring Chinook egg delivery effort also set a record while delivering to 152 classrooms, thanks in large part to the generosity and dedication of volunteers from the Association of Northwest Steelheaders (Tualatin Valley, Sandy, Clackamas River, and Columbia Chapters), ODFW Angler Education, National Wildlife Federation staff, ODFW staff, and STEP volunteers.

Fish Egg to Fry delivery volunteers

Family Fishing Events

This year Lower Willamette STEP led three Family Fishing Events within the Lower Willamette district. One event was held at Canby Pond in March where special angling regulations are in place for youth and disabled anglers only. Several kids caught their very first fish during this event which made it a very special and memorable day. Another Family Fishing Event was held at Trojan Lake in April where the trout fishing was red hot! We had several families show up, catch their limits, and be gone within an hour of getting there. The wind and a fish-hungry otter made hosting the event a bit tricky, but we held strong and didn't let that deter us. We also held a Family Fishing event at Commonwealth Lake in May that paved the way for future collaboration with the Tualatin Hills Parks and Recreation district. The folks in the Tualatin Hills community came out in force and so did our volunteers that day! A big thank you to our hatchery crews for raising all the fish for these events and to the Association of Northwest Steelheaders, ODFW Angler Education Instructors and STEP volunteers for making these events possible!

Free Fishing Events

The Lower Willamette STEP program helped coordinate three fishing events that were conducted during Free Fishing Days. One event was at Small Fry Lake in Estacada, where over two hundred anglers enjoyed great fishing thanks to our partners at the United States Forest Service, Trout Unlimited, and Portland General Electric. Another Free Fishing event was hosted at West Salish Pond in Fairview, where nearly 400 people enjoyed great fishing. Many families attended and several kids caught their very first fish ever that day which made it extra special. Many thanks to the City of Fairview, the Get Hooked Foundation, and the Mt. Hood Head Start program for putting this Free Fishing event on for the community. A third Free Fishing event was held at Henry Hagg Lake in Gaston where over 1500 individuals came out for a day of fishing and fun activities. This event was hosted by Wil Warren from I'm Hooked Inc. and was supported by over a dozen other partners including Washington County Parks, Association of Northwest Steelheaders, Hillsboro Parks and Recreation, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Washington County Sheriff's Department, Hillsboro Police Department, and many others. A big thanks to Wil for putting on such a massive event that is beloved by so many people.

NW Steelheaders and Certified Angler Education instructors volunteering for Family Fishing at Commonwealth Lake

Get Hooked Inc. assisting with Free Fishing at Salish Pond

Other Fishing Events

Additional fishing events were conducted at Huddleston Pond, Sheridan Pond, Blue Lake, Fernhill Wetlands, Henry Hagg Lake, and St. Louis Ponds. These events continued previous efforts of getting thousands of local youth and adults actively involved and educated about the fishing opportunities that surround them. Many of these events were also held in partnership with other organizations, including the Confederated Tribe of Siletz Indians, Get Hooked Foundation, Oregon Spinal Cord Injury Connection, Portland Harbor Community Coalition, Washington County Parks, Oregon Department of Health and Human Services, and the Association of Northwest Steelheaders (ANWS). Under the guidance of the STEP Biologist, volunteer groups, ODFW Angler Education Instructors, and members of the angling community aided in teaching youth about fishing, handling their catch and selecting the right equipment.

All species tournament with Washington County and Get Hooked Inc. at Henry Hagg Lake

Habitat Improvement

Used Fishing Line and Tackle Collection

North Willamette STEP continues to maintain and deploy new Keep Oregon Rivers Clean (KORC) stations along rivers, lakes, and ponds in the district. These line and tackle collection stations can be found on the Sandy River, Clackamas River, Blue Lake Park, The Columbia Slough, Commonwealth Pond, Bethany Lake, Herman Creek, St. Louis Ponds, Canby Pond, Salish Ponds, Benson Lake, Promontory Park at North Fork Reservoir, the Columbia River at Rooster Rock State Park and Dalton Point Park, Henry Hagg Lake, Scappoose Bay Marina, and Salish Ponds. Most are maintained through volunteer efforts and by staff at parks where

they are located. NWWD STEP is also seeking new opportunities to place KORC stations in additional popular fishing spots within the district.

Fish Culture

Fish Acclimation Projects

Acclimation facilities have been a key component of fish release strategies in the district for several years, and operation of these facilities is an important function of STEP. Releases from acclimation sites are intended to coincide with hatchery production and provide increased angling opportunities and to spread out angling effort on the Willamette, Clackamas, Sandy, and Molalla rivers.

Since the spring of 2013, an acclimation pond has been functioning on Trout Creek near its confluence with the Molalla River. Daily operation of this facility is performed entirely by volunteers from the Coastal Conservation Association (CCA) and the Association of Northwest Steelheaders. During March and April of 2025, 100,000 Chinook Salmon smolts were acclimated and released from the facility to improve runs that have been struggling in recent years.

The Foster Creek Acclimation Facility on the Clackamas River continued to be a productive site for STEP. Nearly 25,000 summer steelhead smolts and 50,000 winter steelhead smolts from the Foster Creek acclimation pond were released during the spring of 2025. With the guidance of NWWD District staff, volunteers assisted with maintenance and feeding at this facility. Anglers have seen a productive fishery develop in this section of the Clackamas River in recent years, which has spread angling effort out, likely due to these smolt releases.

The Clear Creek Acclimation Facility was completed and put into production in spring of 2009, and the Clackamas River Chapter of the Association of Northwest Steelheaders have provided essential support, performing daily feeding and maintenance duties. No smolts were acclimated at this facility in 2025.

The Eagle Creek Acclimation Facility, located at Eagle Fern Park on Eagle Creek, was completed, and put into production in early 2010. With funding from an R&E Program grant provided through the Oregon Wildlife Heritage Foundation, this facility was built from the ground up on the banks of Eagle Creek a few miles up from the confluence with the Clackamas River. Before the acclimation season in 2023, a large tree fell on the pond and severely damaged it, and no smolts have been acclimated there since.

The Bull Run River Acclimation Facility saw its 14th year of production in 2025 at the site of the decommissioned PGE Bull Run Powerhouse. Releases of spring Chinook Salmon from this acclimation site are part of a District strategy to address problems involving stray rates of Sandy Hatchery Spring Chinook Salmon by giving the salmon a return destination away from the wild fish in the Upper Sandy Basin. The effort is proving to be successful as returns to the lower river have improved while stray rates have decreased. All spring Chinook Salmon smolts in the Sandy River are now released at this acclimation site instead of at Sandy Hatchery, so management of this facility by volunteers is critical. The site at Bull Run saw nearly 200,000 spring Chinook Salmon smolts released in the spring of 2025, with the help of volunteers from the Sandy Chapter of the Association of Northwest Steelheaders.

Winter Steelhead Broodstock Collection

The collection of wild winter steelhead broodstock on the Clackamas and Sandy rivers was completed with assistance from local fishing guides volunteering their time, as well as landowners who allowed access to the river through their property. This project is instrumental in District fish management goals to integrate wild

steelhead into hatchery programs and would not happen without the help of these volunteers contributing their time, in addition to significant financial contribution from operation of powerboats to access the fishery.

Mid-Willamette STEP

Reed Fischer, STEP Biologist

The Mid-Willamette STEP District is a geographically diverse area in the South Willamette Watershed District reaching across the Willamette Valley from the crest of the Coast Range east to the crest of the Cascades. The Willamette River travels the length as it flows from McKenzie River confluence downstream to the agricultural lands north of Salem. Within this area, three major river systems flow from the western slopes of the Cascades into the Willamette (North Santiam, South Santiam, and Calapooia). Another five (Glen/Gibson, Rickreall, Luckiamute, Marys, and Long Tom) drain the eastern slopes of the Coast Range. The district is also one of the most populated regions of Oregon. Salem, Eugene, Corvallis, and Albany are the larger urban areas, but several smaller cities, towns, and rural communities are scattered throughout. The natural resource concerns that have accompanied the area's historical land uses of timber harvest and agriculture have been complicated by the challenges posed by urbanization.

The Mid-Willamette STEP District continued to focus on community science, education, and public outreach across a basin serving a large and diverse population. Much of the district includes urban and agricultural streams, as well as major river systems with high head dams that disrupt natural salmonid migration and spawning cycles. These conditions create ongoing challenges for native salmon and trout populations while also providing critical opportunities for public engagement in watershed scale conservation and recovery.

Education and Program Development

Egg to Fry Program

Education remained a core priority throughout the district. The Eggs to Fry program continued to expand, with more than 220 classrooms participating across Chinook salmon and rainbow trout seasons, reaching more than 9,000 students annually. The program now serves as a key curriculum component for many schools and community institutions. STEP conducted 22 salmon and steelhead carcass dissection events using hatchery surplus fish, providing students with hands on exposure to fish anatomy, life history, and conservation challenges.

Fishing for fathers & families

Outreach and Workforce Development

Outreach and workforce development remained important components of STEP's work in the Mid-Willamette district. STEP participated in community tabling events, city programs, university classrooms, and career focused events to raise awareness of fisheries conservation and career pathways. The program continued to provide meaningful volunteer opportunities for students seeking applied experience and required service hours. STEP also partnered with private landowners to host fishing and learning events for homeschool groups, expanding access to outdoor education opportunities across this large and diverse district.

Fishing Events

Angler education and fishing events were a major focus in the Mid-Willamette District. STEP hosted more than 25 free fishing events for schools, veterans' groups, and organized field trips, along with an additional 15 angler education focused school events. Several events involved more than 150 youth fishing simultaneously with volunteer support. Notable events included programming for the Oregon School for the Deaf and a two-day fishing event at the Oregon State Penitentiary, where incarcerated fathers were able to fish with their children. That event served over 100 participants and included fishing, salmon dissection demonstrations, casting activities, fish printing, and hands on wildlife education. This popular program is likely to expand to other institutions in the coming year.

Big smiles and happy anglers at E.E. Wilson Fishing Pond.

Inventory and Monitoring

Community Science and Monitoring

Community science and field-based learning increased substantially this year. STEP worked with student groups, watershed youth councils, universities, and community partners to conduct aquatic inventories, backpack electrofishing surveys, culvert assessments, bullfrog removal projects, and river cleanups. In total, students and volunteers helped clean up, survey, and explore approximately 27 river miles across the district and sample three local ponds. These efforts involved hundreds of student volunteers and supported biological assessments in urban systems such as Mill Creek and other local waterways, while providing hands on experience with fisheries monitoring and habitat evaluation.

Students learn about ecosystem evaluation techniques

Habitat Improvement

Habitat Restoration and Technical Assistance

Habitat restoration and technical assistance continued across the district. STEP partnered with watershed councils, other government agencies, and private landowners to support restoration planning and implementation. This included planting 500 native trees with high school and elementary students at Mill Creek and a local trout pond restoration site. Despite rule change constraints, STEP supported carcass nutrient enrichment efforts, placing more than 400 salmon carcasses in critical spawning reaches of the South Santiam River. Technical assistance was provided to several of our partner groups including the recently formed Castaway club of Willamette University, City of Keizer, and Mary's River Watershed Council.

Student volunteers helping with habitat restoration

South-Willamette STEP

Martyne Reesman, STEP Biologist

The South Willamette STEP District coordinates volunteer efforts to maintain, protect, restore, and evaluate native populations and habitats of salmon and trout within the headwaters of the Willamette River. Spanning the Willamette Valley from the Coast Range to the Cascade Mountains, the District encompasses the Eugene-Springfield metropolitan areas, the third largest population area in the state. The major watersheds in the district are the Coast Fork Willamette, McKenzie, and Middle Fork Willamette rivers.

Spring Chinook Salmon are the only anadromous salmonid native to the area, although a small winter steelhead run has been established in the Middle Fork Willamette River. Resident and fluvial populations of Rainbow, Cutthroat, and Bull trout are also found within the district. Spring Chinook Salmon and Bull Trout are federally listed as "Threatened" under the Endangered Species Act.

ODFW staff in the South Willamette District take a collaborative approach to resource management, and implementation of the STEP program in the South Willamette District is shared between the STEP Biologist and other district staff. Many STEP activities would not be possible without collective partnerships with other programs in ODFW, and we would like to recognize the staff at Leaburg Hatchery, McKenzie Hatchery, Willamette Hatchery, South Santiam hatcheries, and Dexter Ponds for their dedication to working with STEP. Their support and assistance are vital to the success of many projects each year.

Our STEP volunteer base draws largely from local organizations, including Cascade Family Flyfishers, McKenzie Flyfishers, Coastal Conservation Association, McKenzie River Guides Association, Backcountry Horsemen of Oregon, Eugene Trail Runners, Scouts of America, and the three local watershed councils, and from the community at-large that are unaffiliated with any group.

Education and Program Development

Fishing Events

The South Willamette STEP district hosted multiple fishing events in 2024-25 which included three family fishing events located in Cottage Grove and Eugene; Kelly Middle School Summer Camp "Learn to fish for Trout"; Four warm-water fishing events at Green Island, in partnership with McKenzie River Trust and Middle Fork Willamette Watershed Council for Kalapuya, Thurston and Springfield high schools, and a family fishing event. Mid-Willamette STEP hosted six private fishing events which included Back to Youth Summer Camp, Men in Recovery, Hilyard Community Center Adaptative Recreation Program, HONEY Non-profit, Community Supported Shelters, and Greater Eugene Area Riders (GEAR) "Biking and Fishing"; Additionally, we provided support to River Road Parks Recreation with their family fishing day.

Fishing Event with Hilyard Community Center: Men in Recovery

Eggs to Fry Program

90 classrooms in the South Willamette district participated in the Eggs to Fry Program, reaching an estimated 3600 students. Many classroom educators requested an in-class presentation about salmon life cycles and how human beings have an impact on our environment. The STEP Biologist happily presented information about the Eggs to Fry Program and salmon life cycles to students ranging from kindergarten to high school.

Outdoor Learning

Getting people outdoors with a focus on placed-based learning is an excellent way to engage with students of all ages, and in the South Willamette District, we often collaborate with partner organizations and schools to accomplish this goal. The STEP biologist taught lessons in fish anatomy and biology, fish passage, and of

course fish surveying techniques. We are fortunate to work with several partners to provide free educational field trips to students in Lane County. Forest Today and Forever hosts students at Bauman Tree Farm where students learn about forestry at a working tree farm. STEP leads the fish passage and riparian stations to over 600 students every year.

Habitat Survey led by Martyne Reeseman

Middle Fork Willamette Watershed Council coordinates all the education efforts for the three watershed councils (McKenzie, Middle Fork, and Coast Fork) in the Upper Willamette which includes all Salmon Watch field trips. Additionally, several local schools have natural resource programs that include Springfield School District's Water Energy Learning Lab (WELL) Project (middle and high schools), Sheldon High School Forestry and Natural Resources Program, and Oakridge, Springfield and McKenzie High schools' Watershed Action Teams for Education, Restoration, and Stewardship (WATERS) Program. STEP has led fish, habitat and macro surveys, and fish biology lessons to hundreds of students on multiple field trips throughout the year.

PUBLIC EDUCATION

The South Willamette STEP district strives to provide community and classroom education whenever and wherever possible. In 2024-25, we hosted several educational opportunities at a variety of community events including Springfield's National Night Out, Creswell Arbor Day Celebration, Coast Fork Willamette Watershed

Council “Science on Tap” and Coast Fork Lions Club Meeting. Additionally, we provided fish biology and career path lessons at Lane and Mt Hood Community colleges, and Eugene, Oakridge, and Springfield School districts.

Outdoor education with Springfield High School students

North Coast STEP

Kyle Wilson, STEP Biologist

The North Coast STEP area includes the coastal basins extending from Neskowin Creek north to the Columbia River, and from the Lower Columbia River tributaries to Hunt Creek. The North Coast STEP District covers all of Tillamook and Clatsop Counties, and portions of Columbia, Washington, Yamhill, and Polk Counties. This area has 15 major river systems and over 2,600 stream miles.

All District fish management staff work with STEP volunteers, but the STEP Biologist has primary responsibility for administering, coordinating, and reporting program activities. Projects are identified and guided by local fish management and hatchery needs with a focus on outreach, habitat restoration, and fish propagation efforts.

Volunteer groups in the area have a high interest in fish culture programs. Under the guidance of ODFW and the STEP Biologist, STEP volunteers operate two fish rearing facilities and one acclimation pond, they collect wild broodstock, and they provide key support to several ODFW hatcheries. There are two high schools in the district with hatchery programs. Students in these programs also provide support assisting at ODFW hatcheries, the Stream Enrichment Program, and monitoring. The area also has a growing classroom egg incubation program involving students from seven school districts. STEP staff work closely with several watershed councils, educators, angling groups, and civic organizations throughout the district.

Education and Program Development

Aquatic Education

STEP collaborated with Oregon Shores and Trask Hatchery staff to host a field day for high school age students from the Portland metro area. The class is set up to introduce students to careers in natural resources. Students were able to get hands on experience and learn about salmon/steelhead biology and lifecycle by helping to collect brood stock, observing fish behavior, and were able to participate in the dissection of male and female steelhead.

High school students gaining hands on experience

STEP Volunteer Phil

Egg to Fry release day

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

STEP was invited to be a part of the local festival (Garibaldi Days) this summer. We had a booth set up for fish printing and a casting game for young people to try out their casting skills. The main attraction was undoubtedly the 25 ft. long, 12 ft. tall fish named Claudia. The Upper Nehalem Watershed Council was kind

enough to let us use Claudia for this event. We were asked to showcase Claudia in the parade, so we set the float up with a mannequin named Phil, and gave him a STEP sweatshirt and a fishing rod. Over 300 festival participants stopped by the STEP booth, posed for pictures, learned about salmon biology, and got to enjoy the special event with Claudia. It also must be mentioned that Claudia and Phil won the Mayor's choice trophy!

Claudia the interactive Salmon

EGG TO FRY

The STEP Biologist works with educators and coordinates release events throughout the North Coast District for the Eggs to Fry program. For our Spring Chinook release this year, the local library and their partners invited private school groups and all the community to come and be a part of the release event. After the release, students and participants were also invited to tour the Trask hatchery. In total around 35 youths and 30 adults participated in this event. There are 14 schools in the North Coast district that participate in the Egg to Fry program.

FISH CULTURE

VOLUNTEER HATCHERY PROGRAMS

In the North Coast district, we have 2 volunteer-run STEP hatcheries. Rhoades Pond which is operated by Nestucca Anglers Group, and Whiskey Creek, which is operated by Tillamook Anglers Group. Both facilities had another successful season rearing their fish to release. The STEP Biologist and volunteers from the Tillamook Anglers designed and installed new aluminum dam boards for the raceway at Whiskey Creek this last year, which will make the operation of the weir much safer and effective for hatchery operations. There are 2 high school fisheries programs that are incorporated into the curriculum at Astoria High School and Warrenton High School. Both programs had some fish loss this last year, however students understood that fish mortalities can be part of learning about the challenges of raising fish and the subtle nuances of fish culture.

VOLUNTEER ANGLER BROOD COLLECTION

In the North Coast District there are multiple programs for volunteers to get involved in collecting wild brood for our respective programs. These volunteers help to collect wild Coho, Steelhead, and Chinook throughout our district. We do have a trap on the North Nehalem River but most of the brood are collected via hook and line angling. Including volunteers on these collection days with district staff or on their own is a great way to connect the public with the resource.

North Coast Brood Collection at Waterhouse Falls

MID-COAST STEP

Christine Clapp, STEP Biologist

The Mid-Coast STEP District covers coastal watersheds from the Salmon River and Cascade Head to Tahkenitch Lake, extending from headwater streams on the western slope of the Coast Range to their estuaries. This includes the Salmon, Siletz, Yaquina, Alsea, and Siuslaw rivers. Direct ocean tributaries including the Yachats River and Beaver, Big, Tenmile, and Cummins Creeks also support Mid-Coast salmonid

populations. Siltcoos and Tahkenitch Lakes are two large coastal lakes in the southern Mid Coast that are especially important for Oregon coast Coho Salmon. In addition to Coho Salmon, Mid Coast waters support populations of spring and fall Chinook Salmon, summer and winter steelhead, Chum Salmon, cutthroat trout, and other native non-game fishes. The Siletz River is home to the only native population of summer steelhead that originates in the Oregon coast range.

Education and Program Development

Eggs-to-Fry Program

In 2024, the Egg to Fry Program was active throughout the Mid-Coast District in pre-K, elementary, middle, and high schools in Lincoln City, Newport, Eddyville, Toledo, Siletz, Waldport, Alsea, Florence, Mapleton and Crow. Libraries in Lincoln City, Newport, Toledo, Waldport and Florence also participated in multiple rounds of the program. The Mid Coast District offers 3 rounds of the program with Fall Chinook eggs in January and winter steelhead in February and April. The Mid-Coast Program offers an introductory classroom presentation about Pacific Salmon and their life cycles with egg delivery, as well as a volunteer/teacher guide for weekly discussions about the current developmental stage and various aspects of salmonid life history. Fry release field trips are provided by staff and volunteers with learning stations where students explore fish biology, macroinvertebrates, water quality, habitat, riparian ecology, beavers, wildlife, watersheds, restoration, angler education, and hatcheries (depending on location and station leaders).

In 2012, the Lincoln County School District adopted the Egg to Fry Program as part of their Ocean Literacy Initiative and designated it as core curriculum for all Lincoln County third graders. This program continues to this day. As a result, every 3rd grader in Lincoln County participates in the program, with home school opportunities offered at local libraries. In addition to school-aged students, the Egg to Fry Program reaches people of all ages at library locations with fry release trips offered to the public.

Youth fishing event at Big Creek Reservoir #2.

Family Fishing

The Mid-Coast STEP program either directly hosted or helped with multiple public angler education events and private workshops throughout the year. This included a national meet-up for youth with spinal muscular atrophy. Casting and lure making classes were offered at community events and added to field trip activity stations when possible. Mid-Coast STEP also manages 4 youth angling libraries where youth can check out fishing equipment for free.

Outreach Activities

Activities throughout the Mid-Coast district included career exploration, volunteer recruitment, and aquatic and watershed education through the Fish Eggs to Fry Program, field trips, outdoor schools, and youth mentoring.

Inventory and Monitoring

Population Monitoring

The Mid-Coast STEP Biologist operates or oversees volunteers who work at multiple fish traps within the District, including South Fork Schooner Creek (Siletz Basin), Letz and Whittaker Creeks (Siuslaw Basin), and Salmon River Hatchery in Otis.

Habitat Improvement

Habitat Improvement

The STEP Biologist continued to manage the Riparian Lands Tax Incentive Program for the Mid-Coast. Mid-Coast STEP participated in or provided guidance to volunteers who participated in riparian planting projects, plant nursery work parties, native seed collection events, Christmas tree eco-cycling, as well as maintaining SOLV and KORC trash and monofilament line recycling stations throughout the district.

Volunteers placing Christmas trees for habitat complexity

Nutrient Enrichment

Salmon and steelhead carcass placement projects took place in the Salmon, Siletz, Yaquina, Alsea, and Siuslaw River basins using hatchery steelhead, Chinook, and coho salmon carcasses.

Fish Culture

Fish Propagation

Mid-Coast STEP operated several fish propagation programs within the district. One site on Letz Creek, and one site on Whittaker Creek, which are both in the Siuslaw Basin, and one on North Depoe Bay Creek.

Student volunteers at Whittaker Creek

UMPQUA STEP

Levi Simmons, STEP Biologist

The Umpqua Watershed and STEP district encompasses Douglas County and extends from Diamond Lake in the high Cascades to the Pacific Coast at Reedsport. Douglas County is the fifth largest county in the state, and the Umpqua watershed drains 3.2 million acres of land and is the second largest coastal watershed in Oregon. About 90 percent of the land is forested and approximately 51 percent is publicly owned. The area is home to more than 110,000 people with Roseburg having the largest population of more than 20,000.

The Umpqua Basin supports runs of Coho salmon, Spring and Fall Chinook Salmon, and winter and summer steelhead. Trout angling opportunities include rainbow trout, tiger trout, brown trout, and brook trout that are found in various Cascade lakes. Several reservoirs are stocked with trout and support warm-water fisheries. STEP volunteer opportunities are focused on education, high lakes stocking, and harvest augmentation programs (winter steelhead, Coho Salmon, and Fall Chinook Salmon).

EDUCATION AND PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

Umpqua STEP participated in multiple educational events this year, including Tsalila Festival, Umpqua Fishery Enhancement Derby Kids Day and Student Day, Glide Forestry Tour, field trips and in-class lessons. Additionally, over twenty local classes were able to participate in the Fish-Eggs-to-Fry program this year, with plans to expand this effort into the future. This year we revitalized the “Steelhead Ed” event, where students were able to get hands-on experience working with winter steelhead smolts and learning about fish biology.

Three family fishing events were held by Umpqua STEP. Gardiner-Reedsport-Winchester Bay STEP, Oregon Coast Anglers, Umpqua Fishermen’s Association and ODFW angling instructors worked together to make this year a great success. Together, we engaged with hundreds of members of the public promoting responsible use of natural resources. For many children, as well as some adults, this opportunity provided them with their first caught fish.

Volunteers set up fishing gear for free fishing weekend

Habitat Improvement

Carcass Placement

Gardiner-Reedsport-Winchester-Bay STEP participated in the nutrient enrichment program by placing Chinook Salmon carcasses from fall Chinook Salmon spawning events into the North Fork of the Smith River. As a part of the South Umpqua Coho Salmon program, hatchery Coho Salmon were placed by volunteers into areas of upper Cow Creek. Volunteers also assisted with placing hatchery winter steelhead carcasses in the Canyon Creek drainage.

Fish Culture

Fish Propagation

The STEP program in the Umpqua watershed has worked with local groups to propagate fish since its inception, and this year was no different. During the 2024-25 reporting period, Umpqua STEP volunteers collected winter steelhead brood and reached program goals for egg take on the South Umpqua River. Additionally, volunteers and staff acclimated and released a total of around 124k winter steelhead smolts this year. Notably, ODFW staff, Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians staff, and volunteers mobilized on short notice to ensure steelhead smolts were safely evacuated from an acclimation pond in response to a flood event in March. Volunteers at Gardiner-Reedsport-Winchester Bay STEP collected fall Chinook brood, and successfully spawned and reared Fall Chinook, resulting in over 50k juvenile Fall Chinook being released this year.

Winter Steelhead brood collection

High Lakes Fish Stocking

Several hike-in lakes were stocked by volunteers this year with rainbow trout. This year, we reached out to local hiking groups as well as returning volunteers from Oregon Equestrian Trails to reach these lakes that are only accessible by trail. The project was a great success this year with more than 11,000 fish being stocked in remote lakes.

Volunteers load fish for High Lakes stocking

COOS, COQUILLE, AND TENMILE STEP

Gary Vonderohe, STEP Biologist

Morgan Davies, STEP Biologist

The Coos, Coquille and Tenmile STEP district is located on the southern Oregon coast and is recognized as having been the birth-place of STEP over forty years ago. The area is bordered on the north and east by the Umpqua Basin and by the New, Sixes and Elk Basins to the south. The area holds three major watersheds, the Tenmile, Coos, Coquille, and several smaller streams that flow directly to the ocean. Both the Coos and the Coquille watersheds have long inter-tidal reaches and large estuaries, while the Tenmile is dominated by several large freshwater lakes.

The area program emphasizes citizen involvement with efforts to protect and enhance salmon, steelhead, and trout populations. Early in the development of STEP, education and outreach became a significant part of the local program, as it was recognized that educating the public and particularly area youth would be important toward achieving the long-term goals of STEP in general. Education through involvement increases awareness of the needs of native fish through habitat recovery and protection efforts. In addition to outreach activities, habitat restoration has been an important part of STEP with the initial habitat projects having taken place before the program was formally established. Large numbers of volunteers continue to be involved in the area's extensive fish culture program that includes broodstock development, spawning, egg incubation, rearing, and acclimation projects.

EDUCATION AND PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

Volunteers collecting broodstock

COQUILLE HIGH SCHOOL EDUCATIONAL HATCHERY

The Coquille High School biology students, teachers and volunteers invest hundreds of hours each school year to ensure the survival and growth of 5,000 Fall Chinook Salmon eggs. The process helps students understand the basic needs for salmonids to live and grow within the artificial environment through direct hands-on work at the hatchery. Work and lessons are expanded to include discussions on the natural limiting

factors affecting the wild and hatchery salmon stocks in the nearby creek, local watershed, and ocean environments.

Morgan Creek STEP Hatchery

At Morgan Creek STEP Hatchery, fifth graders from North Bend and Coos Bay schools learn the role that the local salmon hatcheries play to enhance the fishery while having the chance to participate in hands-on activities that help them understand the benefits of a healthy ecosystem, salmon life cycle, and habitat conservation.

In the fall, school classes observe, learn, and participate in the entirety of the spawning process. In small groups, students rotate through five stations where they learn each step of the spawning protocol from experienced volunteers and biologists. Students also learn leadership, teamwork, and engagement skills.

Noble Creek STEP Hatchery

Students from North Bend and Coos Bay schools visited Noble Creek STEP Hatchery to help and to learn the protocols, safety, and responsibilities involved in spawning hatchery Chinook Salmon. The STEP Biologist also taught these students about salmon life cycles and the importance of quality fish habitat.

Millicoma Interpretive Center

The Millicoma Interpretive Center continues to be a popular place for student groups and the public to come and learn more about the life histories of salmon and steelhead and habitat through “hands-on” activities. Groups are involved with the collection of broodstock, spawning, egg and fry care, fin-marking, and identifying stream habitat. Through these activities students learn the importance of habitat conservation.

Family Fishing Events

The annual Empire Lake Family Fun Day was held at the end of April in the city of Coos Bay. As part of the event, several thousand Rainbow Trout were stocked into the lake and participating children learn fishing skills and, for those who need it, loaner equipment is provided to catch the recently stocked trout.

The STEP Biologist worked with the Coos Bay Fire Department to facilitate the stocking of legal sized Rainbow Trout into portable fire suppression ponds for children to catch as part of the Coos Bay Fourth of July celebration at Mingus Park.

Monitoring

The most important monitoring operation that volunteers are involved with each year is the fall Chinook Salmon recruitment surveys that are conducted in the Coos and Coquille River estuaries. In the Coos River Basin, volunteers have a target release of approximately two-million Chinook Salmon juveniles annually. With the large numbers of fish released, an evaluation of the impacts on wild Chinook Salmon is needed. One way to measure the impacts is to monitor the growth and abundance of Chinook Salmon in the estuary.

With the number of juvenile Chinook Salmon collected in the Coos Basin, the STEP Biologist has been estimating the total number of juvenile Chinook Salmon in the basin using a mark/recapture estimate. This monitoring begins in the spring and continues through the fall of the year. Volunteers in the STEP program play a key role with assistance conducting surveys for this long-term monitoring project.

Habitat Improvements

Fish Carcass Placement

Salmon carcasses were again placed in numerous district streams during the reporting period. ODFW staff and volunteers placed salmonid carcasses into different streams across the district. These carcasses were from fish returning to Coos Basin STEP facilities.

Invasive Species Removal

Starting in 2020 ODFW staff and volunteers have dedicated significant time during the summer months to smallmouth bass removal in the Coquille Basin. The main method of removal has been boat mounted electro-fishing.

Fish Culture

Broodstock Collection

Broodstock collection and development programs in the district continue to be a success overall. Volunteers involved in the collection of naturally produced salmon and steelhead for incorporation into hatchery programs donated a significant amount of time. Due to low flows in many streams, volunteers have also helped the STEP biologist collect returning hatchery fish that could not quite swim into facilities. The collection of naturally and hatchery produced salmonids is always very labor intensive.

Student volunteers working to collect Fall Chinook

Pre-Smolt Releases

Large numbers of Chinook Salmon pre-smolts are released in the Coos River Basin. The premise behind the releases is the recognized limitation of spawning habitat in the Coos Watershed that is available for Chinook Salmon. Spawning habitat in the Coos River began to be compromised in 1887 when the practice of splash-damming rivers started.

The Chinook Salmon pre-smolt program in the Coos addresses the limited spawning habitat by producing large numbers of juveniles to utilize the Coos estuary. Coastal fall Chinook Salmon rear almost extensively in coastal estuaries, and the Coos estuary is the largest in Oregon. Just over 1,000,000 Chinook Salmon pre-smolts were released into the Coos Basin.

Fish Eggs-to-Fry Program

14 classroom incubators were operated at twelve different schools, along with one incubator located at the Coquille Indian Tribal office. Students learn about the habitat needed for fry to grow, how they migrate to the bays and ocean, as well as the perils that salmon encounter throughout their lifecycle and the returning journey to the spawning grounds. These lessons further impart resource ownership to the children.

Rearing and Acclimation

STEP volunteers operated a total of fourteen rearing or acclimation projects during the report period. Acclimation sites continue to be improved with each passing year. These projects take a considerable amount of volunteer and staff time along with financial resources to operate.

Volunteers spawning fall Chinook Salmon

Lower Rogue STEP

John Weber, STEP Biologist

The Lower Rogue Watershed District is part of the Rogue Watershed District. The Lower Rogue Watershed District includes coastal basins from Four Mile Creek south to the California border. New River, Elk and Sixes Rivers, Euchre Creek, Rogue River, and other miscellaneous coastal tributaries are included in this district.

The focus of the STEP program within the Lower Rogue District is to utilize volunteer resources to accomplish management objectives. The STEP Biologist works primarily with local clubs, landowners, timber companies, watershed councils, educators, and school groups. Many volunteers that engage in STEP activities in this watershed district belong to one of two local STEP groups: Oregon South Coast Fisherman (OSCF) or Curry Anadromous Fishermen (CAF).

Education and Program Development

Program outreach news releases were written for local newspapers, radio, and TV stations. The objective was to recruit volunteer involvement, inform the public of project results, and give volunteers recognition for their accomplishments.

Curry Anadromous Fishermen volunteering at Indian Creek Fish Hatchery

Reel Fish Day

The Lower Rogue STEP and Oregon Parks and Recreation Department sponsored Reel Fish Days. The angler education day is for Curry County schools that participate in the egg to fry program. In April, six 3rd grade classes participated in the event at Arizona Beach State Park.

Volunteers taught casting, line tying, and hook baiting. An aquatic education curriculum was presented once the core skills of angling were taught. Youth fished with assistance from volunteer instructors in Arizona Pond which was stocked with trout prior to the event.

Participants were given the option to keep or release their fish. Students that chose to retain their catch were taught the responsibility of packaging and cleaning their fish for a meal.

Inventory and Monitoring

Chetco River Scale Sampling

The STEP Biologist and Oregon South Coast Fishermen volunteers assisted in a fall Chinook Salmon scale sampling effort conducted on the Chetco River. The sampling effort is planned to improve data on age and hatchery/wild composition estimates for the Chetco River. The volunteers used drift boats and covered the mainstem reaches while ODFW staff sampled in the tributaries.

Winchuck River Screw Trap

The Lower Rogue STEP Biologist and volunteers with OSCF operated the Winchuck River screw trap. The data is summarized and included in the annual progress report for the Rogue Fall Chinook Conservation plan. Volunteers operated the trap for 55 days, collected 3,335 fish and estimated 80,000 Chinook salmon migrated past the trap. The data is used by fishery managers to determine status elements of the plan.

Chetco River carcass survey

Chetco and Rogue Hatchery Fall Chinook Snout Recovery Stations

During the fall, five snout recovery stations were deployed around Chetco River and Rogue River boat ramps. Volunteers solicited prizes to raffle to anglers that donated tagged snouts. Each station has cards available for anglers to fill out to include with the snout. If the card is filled out correctly and the snout has a tag the angler will be entered into drawings that will be conducted at the end of the season. Volunteers collected 256 snouts from various stations.

South Coast Spawning Ground Surveys

Spawning ground surveys are vital forecasting tools for estimating fall Chinook Salmon runs in coastal streams. The Lower Rogue District is responsible for regularly conducting 27 separate surveys every 7-10 days throughout the spawning season. In certain conditions, consistently completing this on time every week can be a real challenge with district staff. Some of the more remote surveys that require greater travel time are especially hard to keep up with. For the 2023-2024 fall Chinook Salmon spawning season, several members of the Lower Rogue Watershed Council volunteered their time to assist with surveying some of these more remote surveys. ODFW held several training sessions tailored to each survey to be sure the volunteers felt comfortable with the standardized sampling protocol. The volunteers were supplied with gear and were set loose to survey their assigned streams. Upon completion, the survey data was reported to the Assistant District Fish Biologist weekly where it was then reviewed and entered into the master database.

Fish Culture

Chetco River Broodstock Collection

Volunteers and fishing guides assisted ODFW staff in collecting broodstock for the Chetco River hatchery programs. Chinook were seined throughout the lower Chetco River, while steelhead were collected from angler caught donations. Volunteers with the OSCF supported the Chetco Chrome Challenge Derby to encourage the collection effort. The South coast of Oregon is one of few places where you can still harvest wild Steelhead, so getting these donations from anglers is challenging. Chinook Salmon and steelhead collected were transported to Elk River Hatchery.

Chetco River broodstock collection

Upper Rogue STEP

Monica Magdaleno, STEP Biologist

The Upper Rogue STEP District includes most of the Rogue Watershed, extending from the headwaters near Crater Lake, downstream to Mule Creek near the community of Marial. The Rogue Watershed has the largest human population of any coastal watershed in Oregon. Approximately 400,000 people live in the district, posing challenges for fish and wildlife resources, but also providing opportunities for many schools, service clubs, sportsman's clubs, and volunteers to assist in various STEP projects that educate citizens and improve fish habitat throughout the basin. Monitoring efforts with winter upstream migrant hoop traps and spring outmigrant fry traps, and riparian maintenance accounted for a substantial amount of volunteer hours of direct monitoring. Several projects in the winter and summer of 2025 continued to support the Rogue South Coast Multi-Species Conservation and Management Plan (RSP), including angler creel interviews and steelhead spawning surveys. The volunteer operation of an adult weir near Cole Rivers Hatchery supported reductions in the proportion of hatchery origin spawners (pHOS) of spring Chinook Salmon. Carcass tosses, habitat projects, increased presence at community outreach events, and the fish eggs to fry program are all projects where the STEP biologist is making efforts to incorporate diversity, equity, and inclusion into the Upper Rogue STEP.

Education and Program Development

Fish Eggs-to-Fry Program: Classroom Incubators

In the Upper Rogue District, the Eggs-to-Fry Program focuses on raising Spring Chinook Salmon from the eyed-eggs stage to button-up fry. The fall of 2025 saw a return to teacher interest in classroom incubators with a total of 67 classrooms participating in the program, with eight new schools joining this year. The program provides students with hands-on experience in the salmon life cycle and promotes stewardship within these communities.

Volunteers help educate students through the egg to fry program

Bear Creek Salmon Festival at North Mountain Park, Ashland

This was the 18th annual Bear Creek Salmon Festival held at North Mountain Park in Ashland. Several community members, state agencies, and non-profit organizations hosted the event which brought in 100+ attendees. This event is a great opportunity to educate the local community about the salmon life cycle and environmental stewardship. STEP volunteers helped set up a 400-gallon mobile aquarium that had three fall Chinook and three summer steelhead on display. A huge positive of this event was being able to point to the Chinook in the tank and explain that these fish are migrating up Bear Creek. This was a wonderful segway to additional discussion about our native fish and their habitat in the area.

Bear Creek Salmon Festival

Salmon Watch

The local SalmonWatch chapter delivered eight weeks of outdoor education to 1,483 students throughout the valley. The STEP Biologist coordinated delivery of 100 fish carcasses for dissections with volunteer instructors, other district staff, and staff from Cole Rivers Hatchery. These fieldtrips included salmon dissections, water quality testing, fire ecology, macroinvertebrate identification, and live viewings of salmon spawning. This program fosters early awareness of watershed health and connects students to real-world conservation efforts and practices.

Inventory and Monitoring

Out-Migrant Fry Trapping

Volunteers operated five outmigrant fry traps, contributing 520 hours to monitor fish movement, identify barriers, and support restoration planning. These efforts provide critical data for improving fish passage and habitat quality especially during ongoing drought conditions. The data collected will help illustrate what the general trend of outmigration is on each respective creek before and after restoration projects may be implemented. Due to all the trapping efforts implemented by volunteers, the district was able to increase fish distribution for Chinook by several miles on a tributary to the Rogue River.

Habitat Improvements

Stream Nutrient Enrichment

62 volunteers from the Middle Rogue Steelheaders, Southern Oregon Flyfishers, Trout Unlimited, and the Rogue Flyfishers spent 248 hours placing carcasses along three tributaries to the Rogue to enhance stream nutrients. This practice mimics natural processes, supporting aquatic food webs, and improving ecosystem resilience.

Volunteers help with salmon carcass placements

Big smiles for carcass placement events

East Region

Eastern Oregon STEP

Jennifer Luke, STEP Biologist

The Eastern Oregon STEP program is administered by the ODFW High Desert and Northeast regions. These regions together cover the entire state east of the Cascades. This area includes the following major watersheds: Deschutes, Klamath, Malheur, Lake, John Day, Umatilla, Grande Ronde, and Owyhee.

The STEP Biologist and local volunteers work with ODFW districts and hatcheries to identify specific projects requiring volunteer recruitment, supervision, or training. Project definition and direction come from the individual fish management districts and are based on the annual needs.

The STEP program focuses its efforts on monitoring trout populations, conducting aquatic education programs, stocking trout and salmon, and restoring fish habitat.

Volunteers assist with a variety of surveys including electro-fishing, trap netting, spawning surveys, snorkel surveys, hook and line surveys and zooplankton sampling. ODFW fish biologists utilize information gathered from these surveys to evaluate, monitor fish species, and meet fish management objectives.

Activities involving schools, teacher education, and public education about fish populations and their habitats are a high priority for the Eastern Oregon STEP district. STEP volunteers share their knowledge of both fishing and conservation, and their involvement fosters the next generation of conscientious anglers and conservationists.

Education and Program Development

Metolius Pond: Youth Angling and Aquatic Education

Metolius Pond, owned by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW), serves as a designated Youth Education Site under the Salmon and Trout Enhancement Program (STEP). This site is ADA accessible and supports a wide range of educational initiatives aimed at engaging young people in angling and aquatic science. There were multiple fishing events held at Metolius Pond in the 2024-25 reporting period, along with outdoor education classes sponsored by the STEP Biologist and local volunteer groups.

Pat McCaffery teaches water quality at Metolius Pond

Outreach Events

In collaboration with the local Trout Unlimited chapter, the STEP biologist leads educational field trips that immerse students in the study of trout and their natural habitats. These excursions take students to nearby streams, where they explore the origins of rivers, examine surrounding ecosystems, and gather evidence to assess whether the habitat can support healthy fish populations. These hands-on experiences foster a deeper understanding of aquatic environments and conservation.

Inventory and Monitoring

Crooked River Redband Trout Population Estimate

Each year, biologists and volunteers conduct a five-day survey along a seven-mile stretch of the Crooked River below Bowman Dam. This section, known for its excellent trout fishing, is home to redband trout and mountain whitefish. The survey is crucial for tracking population trends, especially since redband trout numbers have shown cyclical fluctuations with unclear causes. The data collected is made publicly available to aid fisheries management and inform the angling community.

Invasive Tui Chub Control and Monitoring

In East and Lava Lakes—two popular fishing destinations in Central Oregon—
Tui Chub pose a significant threat to native trout populations. To combat this, the STEP biologist, along with Oregon State University fish and wildlife students and dedicated volunteers, deploy trap and fyke nets during the spring and summer spawning seasons when chub gather in shallow shoals. In 2025, the STEP biologist led removal efforts at East Lake, while operations at Lava Lake were coordinated by the resort owner and a volunteer. Together, they successfully removed 12,000 pounds of chub from the two lakes last year.

Trout Unlimited Field Day

Invasive species removal

Monitoring Redband Trout – Deep Creek and S.F. Crooked

STEP also supports the ODFW Bend district by conducting electrofishing surveys in Deep Creek and the South Fork of the Crooked River. Using backpack electrofishing equipment, these surveys help monitor redband trout populations. Volunteers often assist with data recording, fish netting, and transporting trout, contributing to both scientific research and community engagement in conservation efforts.

Redband trout sampling in the South Fork Crooked River

STEP Administration

Marty Olson, STEP/R&E Program Coordinator

Sara Hart, STEP/R&E Program Assistant

Michele Weaver, Recreational Fisheries Program Manager (acting)

Education and Development

The Salmon & Trout Advisory Committee (STAC) held two meetings:

- October 3rd & 4th, 2024 in person meeting in Newport, OR
- April 24th, 2025 in person meeting in Astoria, OR

During this report period, no new members were appointed to the STAC board. The nine STAC members are appointed by the Governor to represent the volunteer community in specific geographic areas of Oregon.

More information about STEP and the STAC board and meetings can be found on the STEP webpage located at http://www.dfw.state.or.us/fish/step/.

Salmon and Trout Advisory Committee Board members, Steve Janego and Roger Lindquist, on a field tour at Salmon River Hatchery

APPENDICES

Appendix 1:

Salmon and Trout Advisory Committee (STAC) board members as of December 2025.

Member	Region	Term	Term Expires
Michael Calhoun	North Coast	First Term	June 30, 2027
Jessica Eubank	Mid-Coast	First Term	May 20, 2026
Dave Grosjacques	Umpqua	Second Term	June 3, 2026
Mindie Wilson	Tenmile, Coos, Coquille	First Term	March 4, 2028
Roger Lindquist	Lower Rogue	Second Term	June 30, 2029
Carl Cole	Upper Rogue	Second Term	June 3, 2026
Morgan Parks	North Willamette	Second Term	April 24, 2027
Carolyn Mason	South Willamette	First Term	November 19, 2029
Fred Cholick	Eastern Oregon	First Term	July 9, 2029

Appendix 2:

ODFW STEP positions as of December 2025.

Statewide

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Mid-Willamette STEP

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