



Oregon

Theodore R. Kulongoski, Governor

Water Resources Department

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Water Resources Commission

FROM: Phillip C. Ward, Director

SUBJECT: Agenda Item A, February 22, 2007
Water Resources Commission Meeting

I. Issue Statement

Staff will present Department commitments identified in the State of Oregon Conservation Plan for the Oregon Coast Coho Evolutionarily Significant Unit (ESU). The Commission is asked to endorse identified commitments in the Conservation Plan, and continued cooperative participation under the Oregon Plan for Salmon and Watersheds.

II. Background

Oregon Coast Coho Assessment

In 2005, Oregon completed an assessment of Oregon Coast coho. The assessment was used to determine current status, identify key limiting factors, evaluate effectiveness of Oregon programs, and inform the NOAA Fisheries listing decision under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

NOAA Fisheries has determined the Oregon Coast coho ESU does not currently require protection under the ESA. The ESU is considered a species for purposes of protection under the ESA and represents a collection of salmon populations that share similar traits. The Coast Coho ESU is comprised of five geographic groups, or stratum, that range from the Necanicum River near Seaside in the North Coast to the Sixes River near Port Orford in the Mid-South Coast (Attachment 1). Within these groups, 56 Coho populations have been identified. The assessment focused, in particular, on independent coho populations (i.e. those populations able to persist within their historic habitat through normal environmental variations).

Overall, the assessment concluded the ESU as a whole, and each stratum, are viable. This means they are not in danger of extinction nor are they likely to become endangered within the foreseeable future. Fourteen of 21 independent populations passed viability criteria and 7 did not. All independent populations were limited by a lack of complex stream habitat needed to support over-wintering juvenile coho, such as deep pools, large wood, and off channel refuge. Water quality was a secondary limiting factor for the majority of populations. The Middle and South Umpqua populations were limited by water quantity.

Conservation Plan for Oregon Coast Coho

The Conservation Plan for Oregon Coast Coho was developed to ensure continued viability of Coast coho salmon and achieve a desired status that provides substantial ecological and societal benefits. It was developed with significant input from a diverse group of stakeholders, NOAA Fisheries Technical Recovery Team, and Oregon Plan Core Team members. The Conservation Plan meets requirements of the Native Fish Conservation Policy and provides the basis for recovery plan development and implementation at the local scale.

The Conservation Plan targets a return in the number of spawners about twice the numbers observed during recent years of poor ocean conditions. It defines measurable criteria to increase their productive capacity and the capacity of their habitat. These criteria include abundance, productivity, distribution, persistence, diversity, and habitat. This desired status represents a broad sense goal that reflects the mission of the Oregon Plan for Salmon and Watersheds.

The Conservation Plan provides a strategy for achieving desired status through existing regulatory programs, continued implementation of the Oregon Plan for Salmon and Watersheds, enhanced support for non-regulatory cooperative conservation, and adaptive management informed by ongoing research, monitoring, and evaluation. The Conservation Plan is designed to be a living document and may be modified over time through the adaptive management process.

III. Discussion

Recently, natural resource agency directors were asked by the Governor to seek the Commission and Board's endorsement of commitments made under the Conservation Plan for the Oregon Coast Coho ESU (Attachment 2).

Excerpts from the draft Conservation Plan that detail Department commitments are provided in Attachment 3. The Department's efforts build on existing Oregon Plan actions and on new statewide concepts that may benefit Coast Coho Conservation efforts, provided sufficient resources are available in the Agency's 2007-2009 Legislatively Adopted Budget.

In 2003, the Department defined five measures with specific agency actions that contribute to the ongoing success of the Oregon Plan for Salmon and Watersheds. Among other things, Department efforts have focused on voluntary flow restoration opportunities, distribution and protection for instream water rights, increased water use measurement and increasing our understanding of water resources.

At the time of the assessment, there were over 3,700 miles of stream protected by an instream water right in the Oregon Coast Coho ESU. Within the ESU, 66 voluntary streamflow restoration projects were completed for a total of 25 cfs of restored flow.

In addition to these commitments, the Department will continue to participate in the Oregon Plan for Salmon and Watershed governance structure, including Core, Implementation, Monitoring, and Outreach and Education teams. The Department commits to data sharing and collaborative interagency analyses of available data and to continued application of Oregon's adaptive management process as monitoring data become available and are periodically assessed. Lastly, the Department commits to exploration of new opportunities to provide relevant data in a readily accessible format through the Department's website.

IV. Summary

The Department has been involved in an extensive interagency and stakeholder process to assess Oregon Coast Coho and identify key factors limiting the ESU. Following this assessment process, NOAA Fisheries has determined the Oregon Coast Coho ESU does not currently require protection under the ESA. To ensure the continued viability of Coast Coho and to achieve a desired status, the State of Oregon developed the Coast Coho Conservation Plan. This Conservation Plan provides a strategy for achieving desired status by addressing factors limiting the species through existing regulatory programs, continued implementation of the Oregon Plan for Salmon and Watersheds, enhanced support for non-regulatory cooperative conservation, and adaptive management informed by ongoing research, monitoring and evaluation.

The Department commits to ongoing fulfillment of Oregon Plan efforts, continued interagency coordination under the Oregon Plan framework and several new statewide concepts, contingent on funding. The Commission is asked to endorse the Department's commitments under the Conservation Plan.

V. Alternatives

1. Endorse Department commitments to the State of Oregon Conservation Plan for the Oregon cost Coho ESU
2. Request additional information

VI. Recommendation

The Director recommends Alternative 1, endorsement of Department commitments under the State of Oregon Conservation Plan for the Oregon Coast Coho ESU, and continued cooperative Department participation under the Oregon Plan for Salmon and Watersheds.

Attachments

1. Map of the Oregon Coast Coho ESU
2. Governor's Request to Natural Resource Agency Directors
3. Existing Department actions and new policy options

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