



Wild Steelhead Coalition Fact Sheet

1. In 1996 NOAA fisheries divided the west coast wild steelhead populations in California, Oregon, Washington, and Idaho into 15 Evolutionary Significant Units (ESUs), or discrete areas with similar genetic, life history and evolutionary traits. This was done for the purpose of evaluating the status of separate metapopulation units under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).
2. As of January 2004, eleven ESUs were either listed or a candidate under review for possible listing. Two of the 15 units were listed as Endangered (in danger of extinction), eight of the units were listed as threatened (in danger of becoming endangered) and one coastal Oregon Unit remained under further review.
3. In the mid 1950's, over 125 Washington rivers were producing catches of wild steelhead. Recently there have been only 15 to 18 Washington rivers open to wild fish harvest due to ESA listings and low spawner escapements. In the mid 1950's, about 60,000 to 90,000 wild steelhead were annually harvested by Washington sport fishers (harvest estimates are based on WDFW data and correction recommendations). In 2003, Washington sport fishers harvested 3,554 wild steelhead.
4. Hatchery fish now comprise 97.7 percent of the Washington sport steelhead harvest. In western Washington (Puget Sound and Coastal catch areas), hatchery fish comprise 90.4% of the sport harvest.
5. Washington's wild steelhead populations are either listed under the Federal Endangered Species Act, chronically under-escaped or in periods of recent population declines. Of Washington's 7 steelhead ESUs, 3 are now listed as *Threatened*, 1 is listed as *Endangered*, while the other 3 do not currently warrant listing. In spite of the "not warranted" status, wild steelhead have in recent years been chronically under-escaped in the majority of Puget Sound ESU and Southwest Washington ESU streams. In recent years, only the Olympic Peninsula ESU has wild returns that have usually exceeded escapement goals and are open to harvest.
6. Most of the Olympic Peninsula wild runs have been in a downward trend between their individual run-size peaks in the early/mid 1990's and the latest run-size estimates from 2003. As the Columbia River and its tributaries, Puget Sound, Southwest Washington, and Oregon rivers closed to wild steelhead fisheries and/or

harvest, many guides and fishers have relocated their fishing activities to the Olympic Peninsula.

7. For the past few years, the Pysht, Quinault, Hoh, Queets, Dickey, Sol Duc, Quillayute, Calawah and Bogachiel River total runs and escapements have all been in a downward trend from their recent peak run-size returns.
8. Last year (2002/03) the Hoh River was under-escaped by 800 fish. The run-size would have easily exceeded the escapement goal of 2400 spawners, but the combined sport and tribal harvest drove the escapements well-below the escapement goal. This situation came about because of an overly optimistic pre-season run-size forecast that was used to establish the harvest fisheries for 2002/03. For 2003/04, the pre-season run-size forecast calls for 4453 fish, and the co-managers agreed to a harvest allocation of 1395 fish for the Hoh tribe and 668 for sport fishers. **The co-manager's plan calls for a targeted wild steelhead escapement of 2360 fish, or 40 fish below the escapement goal! We can only hope that this year's preseason forecast underestimates, rather than overestimates, this year's actual returns, and that the harvesters fail to achieve their full allocations.**
9. The Queets River has been managed for spawners below its desired WDFW escapement for the last 10 years due to tribal demands.
10. Sport catch data since the 5 fish annual limit was established in 2001 indicates the regulation change has not reduced the total annual sport harvest of wild fish. For example, between 2000/01 and 2001/02, the Quillayute escapement declined 1300 fish while the sport kill increased from 1790 to 1930 fish.
11. Harvest models have failed wild salmonids in the 20th and 21st centuries as they are too simplistic and do not account for environmental variations, the role of life history diversity in population resilience, and other factors that are critical for sustaining healthy wild salmonid populations (freshwater habitat degradation, negative impacts of hatchery programs, etc).
12. Ocean and terrestrial productivity continually changes without notice or prediction, and this has major impacts and changes in salmonid populations. The only way to plan for these changes is to manage wild stocks much more conservatively than they have been with "maximum sustained harvest (MSH)" guidelines.
13. The life history of wild steelhead is far more diverse than most other salmonids. Seasonal runs, multiple year classes within a run, repeat spawners, juveniles that spend 1 to 3 years in the river, a riverine only component (rainbow trout), and river specific genetics, if protected, will provide resiliency and stability to these fish, even during poor environmental cycles.
14. A growing majority of sport fishers clearly prefer a non-harvest plan for wild steelhead. In 1995, 42.3% preferred CnR, 14% preferred harvest, and 43.4% had mixed opinions. In 2001, 49.3% preferred Wild Fish Release, 11.5% preferred releasing all steelhead, 2% preferred to close the fishery, and 33.9% preferred

continued harvest (with 3.4% having no opinion). Combined, 65% of those with an opinion in 2001 preferred either CnR or closure for wild fish, even when a river would meet spawning escapement needs.