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Wild Steelhead Coalition optimistic for action to protect and recover Puget Sound steelhead

Puget Sound's wild steelhead are legendary in angling circles for their size, strength, beauty, and mystique. The past decade has been anything but the best of times for Puget Sound's steelhead. In fact, they have been experiencing a long downward spiral in their abundance for decades. For many concerned anglers it has been frustrating that steelhead troubles have received much less media attention and agency action than those of other depleted populations of Pacific salmon. NOAA Fisheries officially acknowledged the severe depletion of Puget Sound steelhead with their recently released proposal to list them as Threatened with extinction under the US Endangered Species Act. As members of the Wild Steelhead Coalition conservation group, we are hopeful that steelhead recovery plans can be developed and meshed with existing salmon recovery efforts like the Shared Strategy for Puget Sound, which up to now have been aimed at protecting and recovering ESA listed Puget Sound bull trout and chinook and chum salmon. While many of the habitat requirements for steelhead overlap with those for bull trout and salmon, there are unique issues to address for effective steelhead recovery plans. Steelhead populations are complex, with a wide variety of freshwater and ocean rearing periods and generally mysterious migration patterns in the ocean. Steelhead also use an exceptionally diverse suite of habitats in both very large and very small streams. We commend NOAA fisheries for their careful, comprehensive, and considerate status review for Puget Sound's wild steelhead. We are also optimistic that the proposed ESA listing will galvanize public support for taking the actions needed to improve the protection for and recovery of our priceless, but severely depleted steelhead populations in Puget Sound.

Sincerely,

Wild Steelhead Coalition
Rich Simms
President