

Draft Rogue River spring chinook conservation plan available for public comment

by Bend Weekly News Sources

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife has completed a Draft Rogue River Spring Chinook Conservation Plan and is seeking public input, officials announced today.

The draft conservation plan identifies desired status and conservation status for the population, and outlines nine alternatives designed to attain the desired status. ODFW developed these plan elements in collaboration with an Advisory Committee that has been meeting since May 2004. The committee includes representatives of state and federal agencies and various fishing interest groups.

“Numbers of returning adult wild spring chinook have dropped significantly since Lost Creek Dam was built in the late 1970s,” said Tom Satterthwaite, fisheries researcher and co-author of the draft plan. “It’s clear that the population has declined in comparison to other wild chinook populations in the eco-region.”

Satterthwaite said that the impacts of dam construction and operation, coupled with the selective nature of fishery impacts has changed the life history of the Rogue’s wild spring chinook population. Declines in early-run and mid-run fish are more pronounced as compared to late-run fish.

Before Lost Creek Dam was built, wild spring chinook returns averaged about 28,000 and ranged from a low of about 14,000 to a high of 59,000. Since 1990, wild spring chinook returns have averaged about 9,000 despite decreased harvest rates in the ocean fisheries.

Because of these low returns, ODFW in 2004 adopted harvest limits on Rogue River wild spring chinook of one wild fish per day and three per year. That rule is not popular with anglers, partially because the change does not address all the factors limiting wild spring chinook production.

The draft plan outlines the two management alternatives that received support from members of the advisory committee. Strategies common to both alternatives to achieve desired status and conservation status include changes in reservoir management practices and hatchery management practices, and the establishment of an angling “deadline” for wild spring chinook. Neither alternative calls for changes in harvest opportunities for hatchery fish, which currently account for about 60 percent of the run.

ODFW will hold two public meetings to gather input on the draft conservation plan. A Jan. 23 meeting will be held in Gold Beach and a Jan. 30 meeting is scheduled in Medford. Locations and times will be announced at a later date.

Copies of the draft plan are available at ODFW's Gold Beach and Central Point offices as well as on the Web at http://www.dfw.state.or.us/fish/nfcp/rogue_river/

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