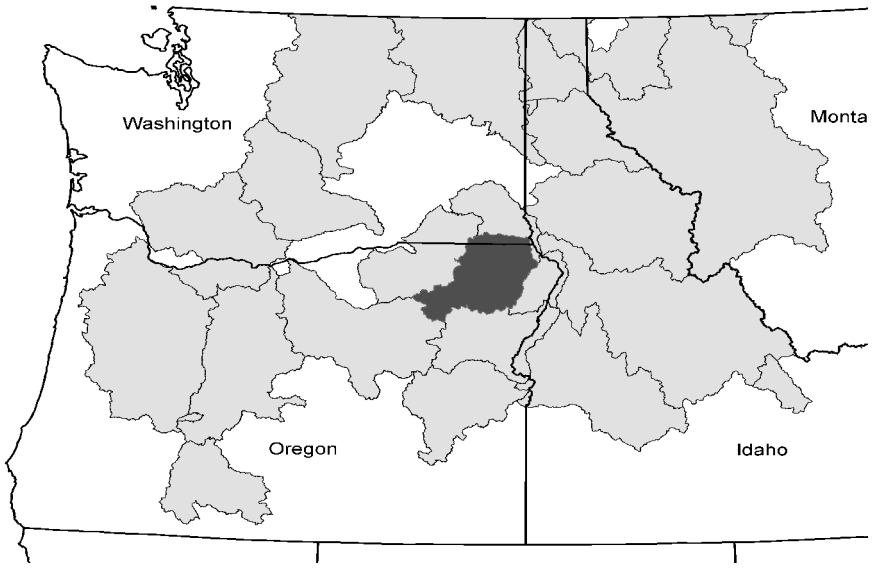
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Bull Trout Draft Recovery Plan

and proposed Critical Habitat

Grande Ronde River Recovery Unit

(CHAPTER 11)



What areas are included in the Grande Ronde River Recovery Unit?

The Grande Ronde River Recovery Unit is located in northeast Oregon and southeast Washington and encompasses a total of 4,632 miles of streams in the Grande Ronde River basin, which drains into the Snake River. It includes portions of Union, Wallowa and Umatilla counties in Oregon and Asotin, Columbia and Garfield counties in Washington. This unit includes two main core areas: the Grande Ronde River and the Little Minam River..

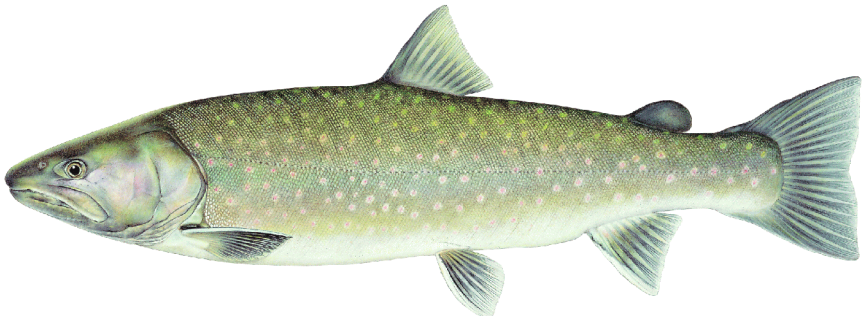
How much of the area is proposed as critical habitat?

Approximately 640 miles of streams in the Grande Ronde River Basin are proposed as critical habitat. This totals about 13 percent of the waterways in the recovery unit. Most of the proposed designated critical habitat (622 miles) is located in the Grande Ronde River core area. The Grande Ronde core area consists of the Upper Grande Ronde complex, Catherine Creek, Indian Creek, the Minam River/Deer Creek, the Wenaha River and Looking-glass Creek. The additional 17 miles of proposed critical habitat occurs in the Little Minam core area. The Little Minam core area is defined separately because of the barrier waterfall at the lower end of the Minam River.

Who developed the draft Bull Trout Recovery Plan and critical habitat proposal?

The draft recovery plan for bull trout was developed through the collaboration of Federal, State, Tribal and private biologists working with representatives of local watersheds, private landowners and industry and conservation organizations. A total of 24 local recovery unit teams contributed to the development of the draft recovery plans for each of the recovery units. These recovery unit teams included experts in biology, hydrology and forestry, as well as natural resource users and stakeholders with interest and knowledge of bull trout and the habitats they depend on for survival. The critical habitat proposal was based in large part on information developed by the recovery unit teams and supplemented with even more recent information on the current distribution and habitat characteristics of the species.

What is the relationship between the draft Bull Trout Recovery Plan and the critical habitat proposal?



The draft recovery plan and critical habitat proposal are closely linked. The information developed by the recovery unit teams, and the science underlying that information, are the basis for the critical habitat proposals. However, critical habitat is designed to provide for the conservation of a species by identifying those areas essential for conservation and requiring special management, whereas a recovery plan is a much larger blueprint providing guidance for the eventual recovery and de-listing of a species.

Who would be affected by recovery efforts and a critical habitat designation?

A recovery plan is advisory only and carries no regulatory authority. It is the Fish and Wildlife Service's estimation of the actions necessary for the recovery of the species. Agencies, communities or individuals are encouraged to take voluntary actions described in the recovery plan to benefit bull trout.

The primary effect of a critical habitat designation is that Federal agencies are required to consult with the Fish and Wildilfe Service on actions they carry out, fund, or authorize that might affect critical habitat. It is important to note that in most cases, this is already occurring under the section 7 interagency consultation requirements of the Endangered Species Act. Non-Federal entities, including private landowners, that may also be affected could include, for example, those seeking a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers 404 permit under the Clean Water Act to build an in-water structure, those seeking Federal approval to discharge effluent into the aquatic environment, or those seeking Federal funding to implement private property improvements, where such actions affect the aquatic environment that has been designated as critical habitat. But again, in most cases where this link between activities on private lands and Federal funding, permitting, or authorization exists, consultation under section 7 of the Endangered Species Act is already occurring.

A critical habitat designation does not have any effect on non-Federal entities when there is not a Federal nexus. For example, swimming, boating, fishing, farming, ranching, or any of a range of activities normally conducted by a landowner or operator of a business not involving Federal funding, permitting or authorization in order to occur would not be affected.

How was the draft recovery plan for each unit developed?

Recovery units were delineated based on the biology of the species and considerations for paralleling existing state conservation and fisheries management frameworks wherever possible. Recovery teams incorporated existing state conservation processes to the degree possible, depending on the degree to which they had been developed (for example, the Montana Bull Trout Restoration Plan, the State of Idaho's Bull Trout Conservation Plan, the State of Washington's Statewide Strategy to Recover Salmon and the Oregon Plan for Salmon and Watersheds).

What is the status of bull trout in the Grande Ronde River Recovery Unit?

Bull trout in this unit are part of the Columbia River Basin

Distinct Population Segment, which was listed as threatened in 1998 under the Endangered Species Act. While bull trout in the Grande Ronde River Basin are not as abundant as they were historically, local populations are found in the Upper Grand Ronde River, Catherine Creek, Indian Creek, the Minam River/Deer Creek complex, the Lostine River/Bear Creek complex, upper Hurricane Creek, Wenaha River, Looking-glass Creek, Little Minam River and the Wehana River. Bull trout were recently introduced into the Wallowa River/Lake complex because the original population was considered to be extirpated. The current status of the introduced population is unknown.

What are the threats to bull trout in the Grande Ronde River Recovery Unit?
Historic activities that have impacted bull trout local populations in this recovery unit include construction and operation of dams and roads, agricultural development, and mining. Some of these historic activities resulted in passage barriers that may have significantly reduced some populations. Existing threats include dam operation and maintenance, activities that affect riparian areas, and competition with non-native fish.

What are the recovery goals and objectives?

The goal of the bull trout recovery plan is to ensure the long-term persistence of self-sustaining, complex interacting groups of bull trout distributed across the species' range so that the species can be delisted. To recover bull trout in the Grande Ronde River Recovery Unit, the following objectives have been identified:

- Maintain current distribution of bull trout and restore distribution in previously occupied areas within the Grande Ronde River Recovery Unit.
- Maintain stable or increasing trends in abundance of bull trout.

- Restore and maintain suitable habitat conditions for all bull trout life history stages and strategies.

- Conserve genetic diversity and provide opportunity for genetic exchange.

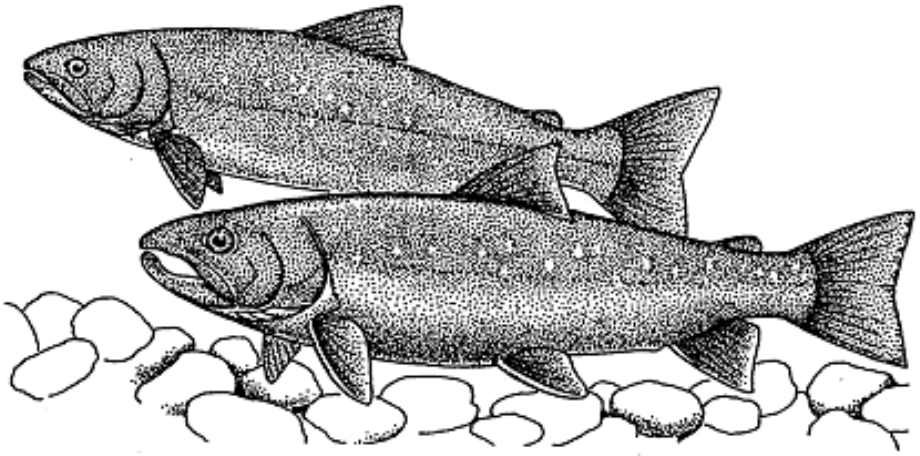
What are the criteria for measuring recovery?

Recovery will be measured according to four criteria: distribution, abundance, population trends and connectivity in the Grande Ronde River Recovery Unit. The recovery plan includes specific, quanti-fiable standards for each of these criteria.

- **Distribution criteria** will be met when bull trout are distributed among at least nine local populations in the Grande Ronde River Recovery Unit.

- **Abundance criteria** will be met when the estimated abundance of bull trout Among all local populations in the Grande Ronde River Recovery Unit is at least 6,000 adults.

- **Trend criteria** will be met when adult bull trout populations exhibit stable or increasing trend for at least two generations at or above the recovered abundance level.



- **Connectivity criteria** will be met when specific barriers to bull trout migration in the Grande Ronde River Recovery Unit have been addressed.

What actions will be necessary to recover bull trout in the Grande Ronde River Recovery Unit?
Recommended recovery efforts generally consist of improving stream habitat conditions, increasing fish passage, and removing non-native brook trout. Specific actions include restoring riparian areas, improving water quality and quantity, providing fish passage, and reducing fine sediment delivery to streams from roads that occur near bull trout habitat. More details are available in the draft Bull Trout Recovery Plan, Grande Ronde River Recovery Unit, Chapter 11.

How long will recovery take?

A recovery plan is advisory only and carries no regulatory authority; therefore it is difficult to determine how long it will take to recover bull trout in the Grande Ronde River Recovery Unit. However, given our best estimate of what government agencies and others might do, it could take three to five bull trout generations (15 to 25 years) or longer before identified threats to the species can be significantly reduced and bull trout can be considered eligible for delisting.

How much will recovery cost?

Estimating the cost of recovery is difficult and complex, due to many variables and unknowns. However, the Grande Ronde River Recovery Unit team has estimated that recovery could cost about $17 million spread over 25 years. This includes estimates of expenditures by local, Tribal, State and Federal governments and by private business and individuals. The estimates are attributed to bull trout conservation but other aquatic species also will benefit. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is soliciting comments from the public on the estimated costs.

How can I obtain copies of the documents?
The documents, along with maps, fact sheets, photographs and other materials may be found on the Pacific Region's website at http://species.fws.gov/bulltrout

How can I comment?
The Service will be accepting comments, beginning November 29, 2002, on its draft recovery plan for bull trout in the Columbia and Klamath river basins and in the St. Mary-Belly River Basin in Montana. Comments on the draft recovery plan will be accepted for 90 days, until February 27, 2003. Comments on the draft recovery plan may be mailed to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Snake River Basin Office, 1387 S. Vinnell Way, Room 368, Boise, ID 83709; faxed to 208-378-5262, or sent via e-mail to: fw1srbocomment@fws.gov

Beginning November 29, 2002, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will accept comments from the public on the agency's proposal to designate critical habitat for the Columbia River and Klamath River distinct population segments of bull trout. Comments will be accepted for 60 days, until January 28, 2003. Comments on the critical habitat proposal may be submitted to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Regional Office, attn: John Young, Bull Trout Coordinator, 911 N.E. 11th Avenue, Portland Oregon 97232; faxed to 503.231.6243 or e-mailed to: R1bulltroutCH@r1.fws.gov

In addition, a series of public meetings and public hearings will be held in January. Times and locations will be posted on our Bull Trout website at http://species.fws.gov/bulltrout and publicized in local newspapers.

This is only a brief summary.

Please see full draft recovery plan and critical habitat proposal for complete details.