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News Release



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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to Conduct Review Of Bull Trout

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced today it is conducting a 5-year review of bull trout, which are protected as threatened under the Federal Endangered Species Act (ESA).

The 5-year review, as required for all listed species under the ESA, will assess the best available information on how bull trout have fared since they were listed for protection across their range in the lower 48 states in 1999. This will include analyses of population data and threats to the species.

“The purpose of the review is to ensure that the species has the appropriate level of protection under the ESA,” said Dave Allen, Regional Director of the Service’s Pacific Region. “Reviewing the latest information will also lead to better management and improved conservation of the species.”

The review considers the best scientific and commercial data that have become available since the current listing determination, such as species biology; habitat conditions; threat status and trends; and other new information, data, or corrections including, but not limited to, taxonomic or nomenclatural changes, identification of erroneous information contained in the List, and improved analytical methods.

If the Service finds that a change in the species’ classification is warranted, the agency may separately propose to reclassify or de-list bull trout. If the agency does propose a change, it would go through a separate formal rule-making process, including public review and comment, as defined in section 4(a) of the ESA. No change in classification would occur until the completion of that process.

Pending completion of the 5-year review, the Service is temporarily suspending work on the draft Recovery Plan chapters for the Columbia River, Klamath River, and St. Mary-Belly River distinct population segments (DPS) of bull trout, which were released in November 2002. We will continue to finalize the draft Recovery Plan chapters for the Jarbidge and Coastal-Puget Sound population segments and release them for public comment this spring to ensure that all the population segments have draft Recovery Plan chapters provided for public review. After the public comment period has closed for these latter two chapters, further work on them will also be suspended pending completion of the 5-year review.

Separately, bull trout critical habitat work is continuing on a revised schedule. Our agreement with plaintiffs calls for a final designation of critical habitat for the Columbia and Klamath River population segments to be completed by September 2004. An Economic Analysis of this critical habitat proposal was released on April 5, 2004, and public comments on it and the critical habitat proposal will be accepted until May 5, 2004. Proposed critical habitat for the Jarbidge, St. Mary-Belly, and Coastal-Puget Sound population segments will be released for public comment in late June or early July 2004. Final critical habitat for these population segments will be designated in June 2005.

In January 2002, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Alliance for the Wild Rockies and Friends of the Wild Swan reached a court settlement establishing a schedule for the proposal of critical habitat for bull trout. The two environmental groups sued the Service for not designating critical habitat after listing bull trout in 1999 as threatened throughout its range in the lower 48 states. At the time, the Service had been unable to complete critical habitat determinations because of budget constraints.

The Service is asking anyone with new scientific or commercial information concerning the status of the bull trout to submit it to John Young, Bull Trout Coordinator, Attn: 5-year Review, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Ecological Services, 911 NE 11th Avenue, Portland, Oregon 97232. You may also hand-deliver written comments and information to our office at the above address, fax your comments to 503-231-6243, or send them by e-mail to R1BullTrout5Y@r1.fws.gov.

Notice of our intent to conduct a 5-year review for bull trout was published in today's *Federal Register*.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 542 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resource offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces Federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

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