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News Release



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Fish and Wildlife Service Proposes Reintroduction of Bull Trout into Clackamas River Population would be “Nonessential Experimental”

As part of a broad effort to recover the threatened bull trout, the Fish and Wildlife Service proposed today to reintroduce this native fish species to the upper Clackamas River. A public comment period on the proposal is open until February 8, 2010. The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife and U.S. Forest Service are cooperators in the proposed project.

The reintroduced fish would be designated as a "nonessential experimental" population, under the Endangered Species Act. This classification precludes anyone who accidentally kills or harms the fish from being in violation of the law, provided that this happens as part of an otherwise lawful activity. Federal projects will not be altered or stopped to protect these fish, and sport fishing in accordance with Oregon regulations would not result in a violation of the Endangered Species Act if a bull trout was harmed.

“For thousands of years bull trout were present in the Clackamas River,” said Robyn Thorson, regional director of the Fish and Wildlife Service. “After evolving there and existing all that time they were eliminated by human activities; reintroducing them will provide another solid step in our recovery strategy for the species.”

The boundaries of the proposed experimental nonessential population would include the entire Clackamas River as well as the Willamette River from Willamette Falls downstream to where it meets the Columbia River, including Multnomah Channel. Recent surveys have determined that bull trout currently do not exist in the area, and it is thought highly unlikely that they could re-colonize the area on their own due to geographic distance to other existing bull trout populations.

The last documented bull trout observation in the Clackamas River drainage was in 1963. Their elimination was likely caused by many of the same factors that led to the decline of the bull trout across its range, including migration barriers from hydroelectric and diversion dams, direct and incidental harvest in sport and commercial fisheries, targeted eradication through bounty fisheries, and habitat and water quality degradation from forest management and agricultural activities not in accordance with best management practices.

A detailed feasibility assessment completed by the agencies in 2007 determined that this reintroduction is biologically possible. The best candidate for bull trout donor stock was found to be the Metolius River, a tributary of the Deschutes River in central Oregon.

If a public hearing request is received on this proposal, in writing, within 45 days of the proposal's publication in the *Federal Register*, one will be held at a location and time to be determined. If a hearing is to be held, it will be publicized in local news media and on the following internet site:

<http://www.fws.gov/oregonfwo/Species/Data/BullTrout/ReintroductionProject.asp>

Requests for a public hearing on the proposal must be mailed or delivered to Field Supervisor, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Oregon Fish and Wildlife Office, 2600 S.E. 98th Ave., Suite 100, Portland, OR 97266. All comments must be received by 02/08/2010.

Comments on the proposed rule may be submitted by one of two ways: 1) through the internet Federal eRulemaking Portal: <http://www.regulations.gov>. Follow the instructions for submitting comments to Docket No. FWS-R1-ES-2009-0050; 2) by U.S. mail or hand-delivery: Public Comments Processing, Attn: FWS-R1-ES-2009-0050; Division of Policy and Directives Management; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Suite 222; Arlington, VA 22203. No email or faxed comments will be accepted.

You may view or download the proposal, which was published in the *Federal Register*, on the following internet site: <http://www.fws.gov/oregonfwo/Species/Data/BullTrout/ReintroductionProject.asp>

The document can also be viewed by appointment at the Fish and Wildlife Service, Oregon Fish and Wildlife Office, 2600 S.E. 98th Ave, Portland, OR 97266 during normal business hours.

We are also seeking comment on the draft environmental assessment (EA), prepared under the National Environmental Policy Act, which analyzes the potential environmental impacts associated with the proposed reintroduction. The draft EA can be viewed on the internet at this link:

<http://www.fws.gov/oregonfwo/Species/Data/BullTrout/ReintroductionProject.asp>

Comments on the EA can be mailed or delivered in writing to Field Supervisor, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Oregon Fish and Wildlife Office, 2600 S.E. 98th Ave., Suite 100, Portland, OR 97266. Alternatively, comments on the EA can be submitted by electronic mail at clackamasbulltrout@fws.gov. All comments must be received by 02/08/2010.

Bull trout are protected as a threatened species under the Federal Endangered Species Act throughout their U.S. range, which includes parts of Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana and Nevada. The draft recovery strategy for bull trout was developed over a three-year period with involvement from more than 120 stakeholder states, tribes, watershed councils, and representatives of industry and conservation groups.

Bull trout are members of the char subgroup of the salmon family, which also includes the Dolly Varden, lake trout, and Arctic char. They can grow to more than 30 pounds in lakes, but in streams rarely exceed 4 pounds. They have small, pale yellow to crimson spots on a darker background, which ranges from olive green to brown above, fading to white on the belly. Historically bull trout occurred throughout the Columbia River Basin, east to western Montana, south to the Jarbidge River in northern Nevada, the Klamath Basin in Oregon, the McCloud River in California and north to Alberta, British Columbia, and possibly southeastern Alaska. Today bull trout are still widely distributed but they have declined in overall distribution and abundance. Small bull trout eat terrestrial and aquatic insects but shift to preying on other fish as they grow larger.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and

natural resources, dedicated professionals and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov

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