

News Release



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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Designates Critical Habitat Releases Economic Analysis for Bull Trout

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today revised the 2005 critical habitat designation for bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*), a threatened species found throughout much of the Pacific Northwest and protected under the federal Endangered Species Act.

Approximately 18,975 miles of streams and 488,252 acres of lakes and reservoirs in Idaho, Oregon, Washington, Montana and Nevada are being designated as critical habitat for the wide-ranging fish. In Washington, 754 miles of marine shoreline are also being designated.

“This action is the result of an extensive review of the Service’s previous bull trout critical habitat proposals and designation, as well as comments and new information received during the 2010 public review process,” said Robyn Thorson, Regional Director of the Service’s Pacific Region. “Our biologists worked hard to ensure the best science was used to identify the features and areas essential to the conservation of bull trout rangewide.”

When compared to the proposed rule issued in January of this year, the designation shows a net reduction of approximately 2,719 miles or 12.5 percent of the streams, 45,174 acres or 8.5 percent of lakes and 231 miles or 23.5 percent of marine shoreline habitat. These changes reflect new biological information received during the comment period resulting in the addition of some habitats and the removal of others, and exclusion of specific areas under section 4(b)(2) of the Act based on ongoing conservation measures, activities, agreements and other factors.

In contrast, the new designation makes significant additions to the habitat designated in 2005. It adds 15,147 stream miles, or roughly 5 times that identified in 2005. Lake and reservoir critical habitat designation increased by 345,034 acres, or about 3.4 times. The amount of shoreline designated is 231 miles less than the 2005 designation.

Approximately 823 miles of streams (4.3 percent of the designation) and 16,701 acres of lakes (3.4 percent of the designation) are not currently occupied by bull trout but are considered essential for the conservation of the species because they provide connectivity between occupied areas. No unoccupied habitat was included in the 2005 designation. The Service revised this designation in part to make it more consistent with existing policy for protecting critical habitat.

“Bull trout depend on cold, clear water and are excellent indicators of water quality,” Regional Director Thorson said. “Protecting and restoring their habitat contributes not only to the recovery of the species but to the water quality of rivers and lakes throughout their range.”

Once plentiful, bull trout were found in 60 percent of the Columbia River Basin but now occur in less than half their historical range, with populations remaining in portions of Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana and Nevada. In the Klamath River Basin, bull trout occur in 21 percent of their historical range. They were listed in 1999 as a threatened species throughout their range in the lower 48 U.S. states.

In all, the Service received 1,111 comments from 350 people and organizations across the five states where bull trout occur. Nine public information meetings were held throughout the bull trout’s range, and a formal public hearing was held in Boise, Idaho.

The revised designation, developed by a team of federal scientists with input from peers outside the Fish and Wildlife Service, is intended to provide sufficient habitat to allow for genetic and life history diversity, ensure bull trout are well-distributed across representative habitats, ensure sufficient connectivity among populations and allow for the ability to address threats facing the species.

“We will continue to work with our conservation partners to make progress toward bull trout recovery and we are working to finalize our draft recovery plan,” Regional Director Thorson added.

The final rule identifies 32 critical habitat units on 3,500 water body segments across the five states. These areas are clustered into six recovery units where recovery efforts will be focused. By state, the designation covers approximately (rounded to nearest whole number):

- **Idaho:** 8,772 stream miles and 170,218 acres of lakes or reservoirs
- **Oregon:** 2,836 stream miles and 30,256 acres of lakes or reservoirs
- **Washington:** 3,793 stream miles, 66,308 acres of lakes or reservoirs and 754 miles of marine shoreline
- **Montana:** 3,056 stream miles and 221,471 acres of lakes or reservoirs
- **Nevada:** 72 stream miles.

In some areas, the critical habitat designation shares Columbia or Snake river borders, including:

- **Oregon/Idaho (Snake River):** 108 stream miles
- **Washington/Idaho (Snake River):** 37 stream miles
- **Washington/Oregon (Columbia River):** 301 stream miles

Critical habitat for bull trout applies only to waterways. However, the rule recognizes that associated flood plains, shorelines, riparian zones and upland habitat are important to critical habitat areas and that activities in these areas may affect bull trout critical habitat. About 63.7 percent of designated critical habitat stream and shoreline water bodies occur adjacent to federal land, 33.2 percent occurs adjacent to private land, 1.8 percent occurs adjacent to state land and 0.7 percent is adjacent to tribal land. Less than one percent is adjacent to land that includes a mix of ownerships.

In developing the final designation that will be managed as critical habitat, the Service excluded 1,707 miles of streams (9.0 percent), 19,396 acres of lakes and reservoirs (4.0 percent) and 216 miles of marine shoreline (28.7 percent) of suitable critical habitat from the 2010 proposed designation because they are areas where key partners of the Service, including tribes, military and some state agencies and landowners with Habitat Conservation Plans, have formally committed to protect bull trout habitat. Fifteen miles of marine shoreline were excluded for national security reasons because the area is used as a U.S. Navy training area.

A final economic analysis, also released today, identifies the potential incremental cost of the critical habitat designation at approximately \$5 million to \$7.6 million a year over the next 20 years. Many of the potential costs are associated with additional consultation requirements for federal agencies. However, most agencies already are managing their lands and waters to a significant conservation standard due to existing critical habitat designations for salmon and other species and the presence of bull trout in 96 percent of the critical habitat

designation. This designation is not expected to add significant additional conservation requirements because bull trout were originally listed due to threats to their habitat.

Other potential incremental costs stem from possible fish passage improvements at dams, estimated at \$2.1 million to \$2.5 million a year among more than 70 federal and non-federal dams. Again, many of these improvements already are occurring for salmon. No significant impact to regional energy production is predicted.

Additional potential expenses, approximately \$400,000 to \$1.65 million a year, are associated with changes to forest management, such as removal of culverts, efforts to reduce sediment and changes in harvest timing and methods.

Under the Endangered Species Act, critical habitat identifies geographic areas that contain features essential for the conservation of a listed species. Critical habitat designations provide extra regulatory protection that may require special management considerations; the habitats are then prioritized for recovery actions.

The designation of critical habitat does not affect land ownership or establish a refuge, wilderness, reserve, preserve or other conservation area. It does not allow government or public access to non-federal lands. A critical habitat designation does not impose restrictions on non-federal lands unless federal funds, permits or activities are involved. However, designating critical habitat on federal or non-federal lands informs landowners and the public of the specific areas that are important to the recovery of the species.

Bull trout are primarily threatened by habitat degradation and fragmentation, blockage of migratory corridors, poor water quality, the effects of climate change and past fisheries management practices, including the introduction of non-native species such as brown, lake and brook trout.

In September 2005, the Service published a rule designating 3,828 miles of streams and 143,218 acres of lakes in Oregon, Washington, Idaho and Montana and 985 miles of shoreline in Washington as critical habitat for bull trout. That rule was challenged in the U.S. District Court for the District of Oregon. In March 2009, the Service requested a voluntary remand of the rule from the court to address irregularities in the rule-making process and outcome, as identified in a 2008 Investigative Report by the Department of the Interior Inspector General. The

Court granted the Service's request and directed the agency to complete a proposed revision by December 31, 2009, with a final designation to be delivered to the *Federal Register* by September 30, 2010.

The final critical habitat rule is available for viewing online at the *Federal Register* as of today. It will be published in the *Federal Register* on October 18, 2010. The new designation takes effect on November 17, 2010.

State-by-State descriptions of the critical habitat units, maps, photographs, general biological information, detailed exclusions analysis, and other materials relating to today's announcement may be found at <http://www.fws.gov/pacific/bulltrout/FinalCH2010.html#FinalCH>.

In addition, a Justification Document, also on the website, has been prepared to explain the Service's rationale for why each critical habitat unit is essential for the conservation of the bull trout.

See our YouTube video on bull trout at <http://www.youtube.com/usfws#p/c/00CA362652FF8AB3>

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