

Peer Review Plan: Species Status Assessment Report for the distinct population segment (DPS) of bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*) in the conterminous (lower-48) United States

Timeline of the Peer review (estimated):

Draft documents to be disseminated: May 2023

Peer review to be initiated: April 2023

Peer review to be completed by: June 2023

About the Peer Review Process:

In accordance with our July 1, 1994, peer review policy (59 FR 34270), the Service's August 22, 2016, Director's Memo on the Peer Review Process, and the Office of Management and Budget's December 16, 2004, Final Information Quality Bulletin for Peer Review, we will solicit independent scientific reviews of the information contained in our Species Status Assessment (SSA) report for the bull trout DPS.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) will request peer review from three or more independent experts. We will consider the following criteria.

- **Expertise:** The reviewer should have knowledge of or experience with the species or similar species biology.
- **Independence:** The reviewer should not be employed by the Service. Academic, consulting or government scientists should have sufficient independence from the Service if the government supports their work.
- **Objectivity:** The reviewer should be recognized by his or her peers as being objective, open- minded, and thoughtful. In addition, the reviewer should be comfortable sharing his or her knowledge and perspectives and openly identifying his or her knowledge gaps.
- **Conflict of Interest:** The reviewer should not have any financial or other interest that conflicts or that could impair his or her objectivity or create an unfair competitive advantage. If an otherwise qualified reviewer has an unavoidable conflict of interest, the Service may publicly disclose the conflict.

While expertise is the primary consideration, the Service will select peer reviewers (considering, but not limited to, these selections) that add to a diversity of scientific perspectives relevant to the SSA report for the bull trout DPS. We will not be providing financial compensation to peer reviewers. We will solicit reviews from at least three qualified experts.

The Service will provide each peer reviewer with information explaining their role and instructions for fulfilling that role, the SSA report, and a list of citations as necessary. The purpose of seeking independent peer review is to ensure use of the best scientific and

commercial information available and to ensure and to maximize the quality, objectivity, utility, and integrity of the information upon which the report is based, as well as to ensure that reviews by recognized experts are incorporated into the SSA process. Peer reviewers will be advised that they are not to provide advice on policy. Rather, they should focus their review on identifying and characterizing scientific uncertainties. Peer reviewers will be asked to answer questions pertaining to the logic of our assumptions, arguments, and conclusions and to provide any other relevant comments, criticisms, or thoughts. Specific questions put to the reviewers include the following:

1. Is our description and analysis of the DPS's needs, biology, habitat, population trends, and historical and current distribution of the species and DPS accurate?
2. Does the SSA report provide accurate and adequate review and analysis of the current and projected future condition of the DPS?
3. Are our assumptions and definitions of suitable habitat logical and adequate?
4. Are there any significant oversights, omissions, or inconsistencies in our SSA report?
5. Are the conclusions we reach logical and supported by the evidence we provide?
6. Did we include all the necessary and pertinent literature to support our assumptions, arguments, and conclusions?
7. Did we adequately address all relevant assumptions, uncertainties, limitations and implications?

Peer reviewers will provide individual, written responses to the Service using our Peer Review Portal. Peer reviewers will be advised that their reviews, including their names and affiliations, will: (1) be included in the decisional record of our determinations regarding the subspecies' status (i.e., final rules or withdrawals); and, (2) be available to the public upon request once all reviews are completed. We will summarize and respond to the issues raised by the peer reviewers in the record supporting our determinations.

About Public Participation

The peer review process will be initiated shortly. We strongly encourage that public comments on the approach of this peer review be submitted as soon as possible in order to allow enough time for processing and consideration. However, we will accept comments on the peer review plan throughout the SSA process.

Contact

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