

To William W. Stelle Jr, Regional Administrator, NMFS West Coast Region

Subject: Comments on Draft EIS for 5 Early Winter Steelhead Hatchery programs in Puget Sound

Option 1 Stop all Puget sound early winter hatchery Steelhead production

Option 2 Continue Puget sound early winter hatchery production at a reduced level of 620,000 smolts

Option 3 Continue Puget sound early winter hatchery production at 310,000 smolt

Option 4 Develop a wild broodstock hatchery program in Puget sound releasing 620,000 smolts

I am an avid sports angler interested in protecting Puget Sound wild Steelhead and also expecting to have continued recreational angling for hatchery Steelhead.

I believe that the proposed hatchery option (#2) will provide recreational angling and also provide protection for wild Steelhead. Since the listing and recent declines in wild Puget sound Steelhead, the Washington Fish and Wildlife Department has made many changes to the hatchery programs to minimize the impact on wild Steelhead such as reduced smolt plants, improved collection of returning adults, and deletion of Steelhead hatchery programs in many. Genetic studies conducted to date indicate that the hatchery-to wild introgression already meets the NMFS upper limit of 2% in 4 rivers and the Snoqualmie is close with 2.7% and further reductions are expected in future years as the above changes are reflected in future wild fish.

Option 1 and 3 are unnecessary to protect wild fish and delete angling opportunity.

Option 4 is impractical because excess wild fish are not available and also because the tribes net fishery is not selective and would harvest more wild fish in pursuit of hatchery fish.

It should be noted that when hatchery programs were deleted, wild Steelhead in rivers such as the Nisqually have still declined to 10% of their former abundance after 28 years (6 generations) and runs in the Cedar have declined to near extinction. Both of these examples suggest that factors other than hatcheries are much more significant in explaining our wild Steelhead declines.

Puget sound smolt survival has dropped significantly in the last decade and is the most significant factor in our Steelhead declines; work needs to be done to find and correct this problem to restore Steelhead.

The very future of Puget Sound Steelhead is at stake. We must find a way to continue the hatcheries in order to continue Steelhead angling in Puget sound, because the wild runs will not support angling in my lifetime. If we lose the angling, we lose the advocates for the resource.

Select option 2 as the preferred option, providing sport and tribal harvest while providing reasonable protection for wild fish while we work on some of the other problems affecting our Steelhead declines. Adhere to strict schedule to guarantee that WDF&W can release their smolts by May 1, 2016!

Name _____ Signature _____
Address _____ City _____ Zip Code _____ Email _____