IDAHO'S STEELHEAD PROTECTION STRATEGY

Edward Bowles

Ed Bowles is State Anadromous Fish Manager for the Idaho Department of Fish and Game. He last wrote in these pages in September 1992 (Issue No. 16) when he addressed the issue of hatchery supplementation programs as a part of Idaho's upriver (Columbia/ Snake) recovery options for wild salmonids.

Perhaps Idaho's leading authority on steelhead, Ed now has responsibility for directing all of the state's salmon and steelhead recovery plans. It is a daunting task and we encourage our Idaho readers to provide as much support as they can to help Ed and his colleagues succeed.

As readers are aware, the National Marine Fisheries Service recently announced its decision to consider ESA listings (endangered, threatened or candidates) for most west coast steelhead stocks. The Osprey then asked the fish and game directors of Washington, Oregon, Idaho and California to provide statements, for publication, about their plans for responding to this NMFS decision. At press time we have heard from California and, here, from Idaho.

Idaho Department of Fish and Game and the State of Idaho are deeply concerned about the status of wild Snake River steelhead. Governor Phil Batt has appointed a task force to develop comments to the National Marine Fisheries Service regarding the proposed steelhead listing. These comments will provide the basis for a steelhead protection strategy which the State of Idaho will advocate in local and regional forums. This letter reflects the State's commitment to steelhead recovery, but is limited to the Departments' perspective on recovery issues. An overall State perspective and strategy will not be formalized until November.

Idaho steelhead represent a tremendous cultural, financial and ecological heritage for the citizens of Idaho and the northwest. This fishery in Idaho two years ago provided 90 million dollars to the state's economy; relative economic importance for individual river communities is even more significant. The Snake River has always been the ecological cornerstone for Columbia Basin summer steelhead, historically providing over 50 percent of total wild production. As a result of habitat loss and degradation in other states, Idaho and northeast Oregon now have over 70 percent of the natural production potential for these fish in the entire Columbia River basin (StreamNet database).

Idaho's wild steelhead are imperiled. Just 30 years ago over 60,000 wild steelhead returned to Idaho and northeast Oregon. Last year only 8,000 returned, providing very few spawners to support the numerous distinct steelhead populations.

Two races of summer steelhead return to Idaho. A-run steelhead enter the Columbia River earlier, are generally smaller, and are less imperiled than the B-run steelhead. B-run steelhead are unique to the Snake River and are extremely imperiled. These world-renowned fish range to over twenty pounds, but fewer than 1,000 wild adults returned last year.

There is a close and direct link between the productivity of wild Snake River steelhead and their anadromous salmon counterparts. Decline of wild Snake River steelhead has generally mirrored the decline of Snake River spring/summer chinook. If factors limiting chinook recovery are addressed, steelhead will also recover.

The Department believes the primary cause of decline of wild Snake River steelhead is mortality associated with juvenile and adult migration through eight dams and reservoirs on the lower Snake and Columbia rivers. Addressing this broken link in the fish's ecosystem is vital to their recovery and
Idaho’s management efforts are briefly described in the following four categories: habitat, hatcheries, harvest and mainstem migration.

Habitat

Idaho’s steelhead habitat is not currently limiting recovery. Steelhead abundance is declining in both pristine wilderness and extensively developed areas. However, with the precarious state of Idaho’s populations, we must strive to optimize survival of every spawning pair. The State is committed to maintaining the multipurpose of Idaho’s lands, but doing so in a manner which does not impair the success of naturally spawning fish populations. The protection of remaining high-quality habitat is top priority. Restoration of degraded habitats, including water quality and flows, in wild production areas is also a high priority. In the long term, Idaho is moving aggressively toward incentive based watershed protection strategies that reflect local ownership and commitments. This approach is appropriate on both private and federal lands.

Hatcheries

Idaho’s steelhead hatcheries were built to help mitigate for wild steelhead lost to hydroelectric development. Until the impacts of hydroelectric development are fully remedied, Idaho will remain dependent on hatcheries for steelhead fisheries. Idaho has always recognized the unique importance of wild, native steelhead and has been at the forefront of management efforts to ensure hatchery mitigation programs do not erode wild stock productivity. Idaho was the first state to mark all of their hatchery fish (mid 1980s), ensuring catch-and-release of all wild fish. Idaho was also one of the only states to designate large areas as wild fish “refuges” that preclude hatchery fish introductions. These streams represent a large portion of spawning and rearing habitat available to steelhead in Idaho.

During the near term, Idaho hatcheries will continue their harvest mitigation role, but management efforts will focus on minimizing potential impacts to the preservation and recovery of wild populations. Specific strategies include: develop smolt acclimation ponds, maintain a limit on the number of smolts released, refine size and time of release criteria, maintain fish health, ensure release sites result in minimal interaction with juveniles and adults from wild steelhead populations, and continue supplementation research to determine the feasibility of using hatcheries to aid recovery of naturally spawning fish.

Idaho was the first state to mark all hatchery fish... and was also one of the only states to designate large areas as wild fish “refuges...”

Harvest

Idaho has not harvested wild fish since the early 1980s, but has watched in dismay as tribal gill nets intercept up to one-third of Idaho’s wild B-run steelhead in downriver fisheries. In the near term, Idaho will: continue catch-and-release and closure regulations for wild steelhead in Idaho, select hatchery release sites to minimize wild fish interceptions, and work toward regional commitment to weak stock recognition and management in downriver fisheries (accurate A/B differentiation, biologically based escapement goals, accurate and full accounting of harvest impacts, selective or constrained fisheries to ensure escapement goals are maintained).

Mainstem Migration

As mentioned, this arena holds the key to recovery of wild steelhead in the Snake River. During the near term, Idaho will continue to develop annual migration plans and promote them in regional management forums. These plans strive to provide the best possible survival conditions for juvenile and adult Snake River steelhead within the current configuration of the Columbia River hydrosystem. These annual plans should embrace a balanced approach that best meets the needs of the fish while maintaining local and regional cooperation. The Department believes these plans should embrace the “normative” river concept as best possible. This approach uses technologies to recreate, to the extent necessary, the historical migration conditions steelhead evolved and prospered under, rather than using technologies in an attempt to circumvent the steelhead’s natural ecosystem. This approach requires a “weaning” from smolt transportation, and a commitment to making the river a friendlier environment for juvenile and adult migration.

Long term solutions must expand from this “normative” river approach to recovery. Idaho is committed to using the best available biological, economic and social information to set a firm course for recovery by the turn of the century. Idaho believes that long term strategies must reflect a balance that best promotes local and regional prosperity, of which healthy wild steelhead runs are a vital component.

A key component of sustainable recovery is public education, support and activism. The Department appreciates the unwavering voice of The Osprey in this effort. I encourage readers to continue actively supporting long term solutions that meet the needs of the fish without undermining sustainable prosperity. The status of Idaho’s wild salmon and steelhead demand that we move quickly and decisively if we are to retain this important resource and heritage.


RESTORATION AND MANAGEMENT OF STEELHEAD IN CALIFORNIA  

Dennis McEwan

The following article was written by Dennis McEwan who is the Steelhead Trout Specialist for the California Fish and Game Department. As such, he is responsible for coordinating the Steelhead Management and Restoration plan for the State of California and is also its primary author. The Osprey staff is pleased to hear from Mr. McEwan and the California Fish and Game department about their strategy for steelhead recovery.

In 1991, The California Department of Fish and Game (Department) submitted an article to The Osprey which described the goals, objectives, and challenges of our new Steelhead Restoration and Management project. Since that time, the Department has developed and published the Steelhead Restoration and Management Plan for California (Steelhead Plan) and have begun implementation of some of the measures identified in this plan.

In response to the pervasive declines of most anadromous fish stocks in California, the State Legislature passed the Salmon, Steelhead Trout, and Anadromous Fisheries Program Act of 1988 (SB 2261) which states that is a policy of the State to significantly increase the natural production of salmon and steelhead by the end of the century. SB 2261 directed the Department to develop a program to double naturally spawning anadromous fish populations by the year 2000. Recognizing that steelhead management is often included in, and sometimes lost within, management of the more economically important Pacific salmon, several Legislators, along with key angling organizations, urged the Department to incorporate a Statewide Steelhead Restoration Plan into the initial element of the SB 2261 program. The Steelhead Plan was adopted and published in February, 1996. This document will serve as the blueprint for the Department’s efforts to restore this prized, and oftentimes overlooked, resource.

As identified in the Steelhead Plan, the major factor causing the decline in California is freshwater habitat loss and degradation. This has resulted mainly from three factors: inadequate stream flows, blocked access to historic spawning and rearing areas, and poor land-use that discharges sediment and debris into watercourses. The decline of wild steelhead is but one aspect of the present statewide decline in biodiversity, caused by California’s burgeoning human population and the ever-increasing demand on natural resources.

The Steelhead Plan recognizes that restoration of California’s steelhead populations requires a broad approach that emphasizes ecosystem restoration. It focuses on restoration of native and naturally produced (wild) stocks because of their importance in maintaining genetic and biological diversity and for their aesthetic values. The Steelhead Plan presents a historical account of the decline of California’s steelhead population, and identifies needed restoration measures both on a broad, programmatic scale and on a stream-specific scale. Some of these programmatic and specific measures are discussed below.

Watershed Protection and Restoration

Land-use activities associated with logging, urban development, mining, livestock grazing and recreation have reduced fish habitat quantity and quality by changing streambank and channel morphology, altering water temperatures, degrading water quality, and blocking access to spawning areas. The Steelhead Plan recognizes that watershed restoration and protection must be a key element in restoration of steelhead populations. As such, the Department supports recent interagency initiatives to restore and maintain anadromous fish habitat of Federal and private lands. The Steelhead Plan recommends specific measures for logging, road construction, suction dredge and gravel mining, and grazing to provide greater protection for instream and riparian areas.

Stream Restoration

There are many streams in California where water has been over-appropriated. The recent six-year drought has shown that there is little water to spare for instream uses in many areas of the State. The Department utilizes several provisions and laws to protect and maintain streamflow for the benefit of fish and wildlife, although protection of instream flows is frequently inadequate. The Klamath River below Iron Gate Dam, the Sacramento River below Shasta Dam, the American River below Folsom Dam, the San Joaquin River below Friant Dam, and the Santa Ynez River below Bradbury Dam are a few examples of former and present steelhead waters where severe environmental problems have resulted because of insufficient releases from reservoirs. Although there have been several favorable court decisions affirming the protection of fish and wildlife under the Public Trust Doctrine, those resources held in trust in many areas of the State continue to decline. The Department needs a more effective means to identify, maintain, and achieve adequate flows for steelhead throughout their range. The Steelhead Plan reaffirms the need for the Department to seek greater flows for steelhead through the regulatory or legal process.

Artificial Production

Although many artificial propagation programs have succeeded in producing fish for harvest, they have generally not produced a sustained increase in the abundance of wild fish or fully mitigated for water development impacts. There is evidence that impacts to wild populations from hatchery supplementation may be contributing to their decline. Two main concerns regarding the effects of hatchery supplementation programs on wild steelhead genetics are loss of genetic diversity and reduction in fitness to the natural environment.

According to SB 2261, natural production is to be the foundation for steelhead
management and restoration. The Steelhead Plan states that artificial production will be limited to areas where it already occurs, where it is necessary to prevent the extinction of a native run, or where the native population has already become extirpated and the habitat is irrevocably altered. For proposed water projects, artificial production will no longer be considered as mitigation for loss of wild fish or habitat.

According to the Steelhead Plan, existing hatchery and rearing programs will be operated to minimize impacts to natural stocks to the maximum extent possible. The Department’s Stock Management Policy, which prohibits the introduction of exotic stocks into watershed occupied by native steelhead, will be strictly adhered to by all agents of the Department. To protect land-locked and remnant populations of native rainbow trout, the Steelhead Plan prohibits the planting of catchable trout in streams inhabited by native populations of coastal rainbow trout.

To provide a solid foundation to begin managing to protect natural stocks, the Department needs a reliable means to differentiate wild fish from hatchery fish, and we are investigating the implementation of a mass marking program at our steelhead hatcheries.

Angling

In 1991, there were an estimated 99,700 steelhead anglers in California. In 1993, the Department began implementation of a steelhead catch report card. This will allow us to better manage angling to insure that stocks are not over harvested, and revenue from the sale of the card will provide funds for restoration projects.

Limited information on steelhead harvest rates suggests that over-exploitation of wild stocks is not occurring on a widespread basis and is not causing the general decline, therefore, a Statewide selective harvest regulation or an annual bag limit does not appear to be warranted. However, this recommendation could change when results of the first few years of harvest information from the Steelhead Report Card are analyzed.

The Steelhead Project is also responsible for reviewing and updating steelhead angling regulations. Over the past few years, many regulation changes have been implemented to protect steelhead from overharvest.

North Coast Management Objectives

The historic range of steelhead on the north coast (north of San Francisco Bay) has not been reduced as drastically as it has in other areas of the State. Consequently, this area has the greatest amount of remaining steelhead habitat in the State and the most abundant populations. The Klamath-Trinity River system supports the greatest number of steelhead in California. However, these stocks have declined from an estimated run size of 283,000 adults in the early 1960’s to about 150,000 in the early 1980’s. Steelhead runs in north coast drainages are comprised mostly of wild fish, although the percentage of wild fish appears to have decreased in recent years.

Greater releases from Iron Gate Dam on the Klamath River are needed. A long-term flow evaluation on the Trinity River will be completed in 1996 and may result in increased releases for fish and wildlife. Watershed and stream restoration activities in the South Fork Trinity River need to be accelerated.

The Department is developing a restoration plan for salmon and steelhead in the Eel River which will identify specific actions needed for steelhead restoration in this system. We are investigating the effectiveness of controlling introduced smolt populations through techniques such as gill netting and seining, electrofishing, explosives, and chemical treatments.

Habitat for naturally spawning steelhead in the Russian River system is severely degraded. Instream flow requirements for salmon and steelhead need to be determined. When the cumulative impact analysis of existing and proposed diversions is completed, the Department will make the appropriate recommendations to the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) so that necessary instream flows are provided.

The steelhead fishery of the Smith River needs to be recognized for its world-class quality and protected from potential overharvest. The Department is investigating the inclusion of this river system in our Wild Trout program which manages the premier wild trout fisheries in the State.

Central Valley Management Objectives

Steelhead ranged throughout the tributaries of the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers prior to dam construction, water development, and watershed perturbations of the 19th and 20th centuries. Populations have been most severely affected by dams blocking access to the headwaters of all the major tributaries; consequently, most runs are maintained through artificial production. The average annual run size in the Sacramento River system in 1991-92 was probably less than 10,000 adult fish. Numbers of wild steelhead above Red Bluff Diversion Dam on the Sacramento River have decreased from an average annual run size of roughly 12,900 in the late 1960’s to approximately 1,100 in the early 1990’s. Wild stocks are mostly confined to upper Sacramento River tributaries such as Deer, Mill, and Antelope creeks and the Yuba River.

Identified restoration measures for the mainstem Sacramento River include correcting fish passage and fish screening problems at the Glenn Colusa Irrigation District Diversion, Red Bluff Diversion Dam, and small agricultural diversions; rerouting the Colusa Drain; and cleanup of Iron Mountain Mine.

Mill, Deer, and Antelope Creeks have the best potential of all Central Valley streams for the restoration of wild steelhead populations. These streams have relatively pristine, well-protected upper reaches with ample spawning and rearing habitat, but they suffer from inadequate flows in the lower reaches. On Mill Creek surface diversions are being exchanged for ground water so that more water remains in the stream for fish. Hopefully, this novel program will be applied to other upper Sacramento River tributaries.
The Yuba River supports the largest, naturally reproducing population of steelhead in the Central Valley. The Department has recommended temperature and flow regimes to maintain and restore the anadromous fishes and will continue to manage the Yuba River as a wild steelhead fishery.

South Coast

Southern steelhead (those occurring south of San Francisco Bay) were formerly found in coastal drainages as far south as the Santo Domingo River in northern Baja California and were present in many streams and rivers of southern California. Today, Malibu Creek in Los Angeles County is thought to be the southern-most stream containing a known spawning population. Southern steelhead are the most jeopardized of all of California’s steelhead populations. Population numbers have declined drastically in nearly all streams where they exist, and runs have been extirpated from many others. Of 122 streams south of San Francisco Bay known to have contained a steelhead population, 47 percent have populations with reduced production from historical levels, and 33 percent no longer support populations. Major adverse impacts to southern steelhead are from urbanization, dam construction, and water diversion.

The Department will seek interim and permanent flow regimes from Lake Cachuma on the Santa Ynez River to restore steelhead runs that have been eliminated by water development. The feasibility of providing passage around Bradbury Dam needs to be investigated.

Constructing a fishway on the Robles Diversion Dam on the mainstem Ventura River would restore access to 10 miles of historical spawning and rearing habitat. The Department will soon begin discussions with the responsible agencies regarding the modification of this dam to restore access.

Recent construction of a fishway on the Vern Freeman Diversion should restore access to Sespe Creek, the largest and most pristine tributary to the Santa Clara River. Results of fish trapping at the Diversion facility indicate that a viable steelhead population still exists in the Santa Clara River. The Department is working with a municipal water district to design and construct a fish ladder on Santa Paula Creek, another important Santa Clara River tributary.

The major obstacle to restoring the steelhead run on Malibu Creek is Rindge Dam, located about 2.5 miles upstream from the Pacific Ocean. The Department is currently investigating the feasibility of removing this dam.

Conclusion

Watershed restoration and protection, providing adequate streamflows, and restoring access to headwaters need to be the focal points for the Department’s efforts to restore steelhead populations. Establishment of conditions, constraints, and practices which maintain watershed integrity and stream flows, and restoration of problem areas which continue to degrade or block aquatic habitat, are of the utmost importance to restoring steelhead populations.

The Steelhead Plan is a conceptual plan which identifies the major factors causing steelhead declines and constraining recovery. Implementation will not be an easy task.

Unfortunately, nearly all of the current constraints on steelhead production are factors outside of the Department’s regulatory authority — such as promulgation of water quantity and quality standards, establishment of best management practices for land-use activities, and providing equal consideration for fish and wildlife in water development planning.

For the Department to fulfill its public trust obligations, we must be more assertive and persuasive in the regulatory and legal arenas, and this necessitates that we have the direct involvement and support of the citizens of California.

We also recognize that restoration of steelhead populations is intimately tied to the establishment of a new ethic for management of California’s rivers and streams — an ethic that places a much higher priority on the continuance of essential physical, biological, and ecological processes in rivers that are regulated or proposed for development. Without this, aquatic habitat will continue to degrade, steelhead and other species will continue to decline, and there will be continued impasses on water usage and development.

Bob McLaughlin, R.I.P.

The sudden death of Bob McLaughlin, on November 14, has left the FFF Steelhead Committee immeasurably poorer. Bob was one of our original members and had been a regular contributor of ideas and energy for many years. A fine writer, his articles regularly found their way into The Osprey and other fishing journals.

His earlier adult life was devoted to the spiritual needs of others. Bob was both minister and chaplain, serving, among other capacities, as senior pastor at Seattle’s Children’s Orthopedic Hospital. He turned to sales in later years but his real love always was fly fishing. He joined the Washington Fly Fishing Club in 1977 and for years delighted and enriched that membership with his wit and wisdom.

Bob was a laid-back guy but his passion for steelhead conservation was always just beneath the surface. His tongue and his pen brokered no nonsense with politicians and bureaucrats who lost sight of the real issues.

Bob’s home stream was the Skykomish River; his lament over that fabled steelhead haven was scribbled in this newsletter in its Issue 12, May 1991. But whether on the Sky or elsewhere, he was always a good fishing companion as well, generous in his revelations and cordial in his relationships. It was fun to run into Bob on the gravel bar.

He was only 62 when his Maker called. Fishing and fishers are diminished by the loss. The Committee extend their inadequate sympathies to Connie and to their two children.
THE CHAIRMAN’S MEND:
GOING, GOING, GONE

Following years of prodding, the U.S. National Marine Fisheries Service proposed listing most west coast steelhead stocks as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act. Similar listings for chinook, coho and searun cutthroat are pending. A last wake-up call and a last chance to save steelhead. Blow this one and the game’s over.

NMFS has one year to determine whether and which steelhead stocks should actually be listed. Don’t hold your breath for effective action. Instead, I predict that NMFS will hold hearings and consider state steelhead management plans, but won’t do much to actually save steelhead from extinction.

The proposed listing only confirms what anglers, biologists (including those inside NMFS,) resource managers, citizens and even politicians have known for years—steelhead and other anadromous salmonids are in deep trouble. Many, indeed hundreds of stocks are already extinct. To date NOTHING effective has been done to halt the steady erosion of native steelhead populations.

Based upon the performance of NMFS, the states and tribes in the wake of Snake River chinook and sockeye listings (threatened and endangered respectively), we can be assured that NMFS will take the full year allowed under the ESA to make its determination. One more year before NMFS or anyone else even considers recovery strategies much less does anything concrete to prevent additional extinctions.

One more year during which steelhead stocks will edge closer to extinction.

Note a couple of other depressing and stark realities. All the salmon and steelhead listings and petitions were initiated by citizens—not the state, federal or tribal resource agencies responsible for the management of these species. The agencies, with both the biological data confirming the desperate plight of salmon and steelhead stocks and the legal responsibility for their management, ignored reality and have been content to sit by while hundreds of salmon and steelhead stocks were extirpated. Even the Native American tribes, whose very culture, spiritual, economic and social well-being depend upon salmon have been ineffective and inexplicably quiescent as robust native stocks disappeared, accepting in their place tame hatchery fish—the fish equivalent of cows for elk.

NMFS, the states and tribes didn’t propose listings. They didn’t implement, in any effective way, habitat conservation. They simply sat on the sidelines while massive runs dwindled steadily to zero.

As if the performance of the responsible officials and agencies was not bad enough, anglers, conservationists, citizens and tribal members are the real culprits. We have accepted the extinctions without a whimper. While NMFS, the states and tribes did nothing, neither did we. In our millions, we sat on our hands. If steelhead and other anadromous salmonids are to make it, we will have to force reluctant officials to take actions which will, in fact, be effective in recovering salmon and steelhead. NMFS, et al. will not do it voluntarily and they won’t do it without an executioner dogging their every step.

Based on almost a hundred years of experience, we can be certain that if we don’t push this wagon, it is going nowhere. At the end of the one-year period on steelhead, left to their own devices, NMFS, the states and tribes will not have taken any actions to halt the slide of native steelhead populations towards oblivion.

Consider first the grim reality that in the history of the ESA, no fish species, once listed, has recovered—EVER. Second, note that in every salmon and steelhead ESA petition, conservation organizations have been forced to obtain court orders to compel NMFS to comply with the law. The states and tribes have not used the many legal tools available to them to save salmon. For example, irrigation screens have been mandated in Oregon for 110 years. The state does not enforce the statute and compliance is a joke. In Washington, access to thousands of miles of anadromous habitat is blocked by non-complying road culverts. The state does not enforce hydrology permits and compliance is a joke.

Consider Snake River chinook (listed as threatened under the ESA,) the runs have continued to decline by about 25 percent per year since listing. This stock is already functionally extinct:

• NMFS has not upgraded Snake River chinook to endangered even though the evidence is crystal clear that this species will be extinct in fact as well as form in the near future;

• NMFS, the states and tribes have neither developed nor implemented a recovery plan for Chinook or endangered sockeye;

• There are fewer Snake River steelhead today than there were Snake River chinook when chinook were listed.

It’s a sorry tale. It is way past time to get real. It will have a sad ending if you don’t do something about it. Some suggestions. If you do not do two out of the three—sell your steelhead gear and tell your kids and grandkids that YOU extirpated salmon and steelhead:

• a letter to each of your congressmen, legislators and governors;

• a donation to The Osprey (the Steelhead Committee’s authoritative, hard-hitting publication devoted exclusively to steelhead conservation);

• a check to Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund and American Rivers (the FFF’s lawyers in pending legal action to force compliance with the ESA, Clean Water Act, and applicable energy legislation).

GOING, GOING, GONT
INDEPENDENT SCIENTIFIC GROUP REPORT  
TO NORTHWEST POWER PLANNING COUNCIL  

Bill Redman

In April 1996, the nine member Independent Scientific Group charged with providing scientific advice to the Northwest Power Planning Council made its preliminary report to the Council on its study of “the scientific foundation underlying the Council’s Columbia River Basin Fish and Wildlife Program.” The Group reviewed more than 4,000 scientific articles in preparing its report, which was requested by the Council in early 1995. At press time release of the final report was too late for coverage in this issue of The Osprey.

However, the April 25th News Release on the preliminary report included a number of encouraging statements. They indicate that the final report will be must reading for serious students of the Columbia/Snake steelhead and salmon runs, and will be a necessary subject for the next issue of The Osprey.

Some excerpts from the News Release follow:

“The key to rebuilding fish and wildlife is suitable habitat throughout the life cycle. Key needs are to reconnect isolated pockets of habitat around the basin, restore habitat features of the mainstem Columbia River and allow the natural diversity of fish and wildlife to re-express itself.”

“According to the committee’s preliminary report, drawing down certain reservoirs could be one way to restore a river-like character to parts of the mainstem Columbia and Snake rivers. It would expose more of the shoreline and allow the river to redistribute gravel and nutrients, thereby restoring the spawning, resting and feeding habitat.”

“They call for re-establishment of what they call ‘normative’ features of the river that are essential to fish and wildlife.”

“They presented us with a new paradigm, a new way of thinking about salmon survival,” said Council Chairman John Etchart of Montana. “This preliminary report calls into question many of the present management practices for the Snake and Columbia rivers. The implications for the choices the region faces are not apparent yet.

“The (current Council fish and wildlife) program... calls for a reservoir drawdown strategy that would be phased in over five or six years. But the controversial drawdown strategy never has been implemented.

“At the time the Council last amended the fish and wildlife program, drawdowns were presented primarily as a means of moving fish through the reservoirs more quickly,” Etchart said. On Wednesday, we heard new information about the importance of revitalizing the river habitat, and that drawdowns would help. But we don’t know how deep or in which reservoirs. We have a lot to think about, and it’s too soon to say what the Council will do with this information.

“The scientists’ theme is that fish and wildlife restoration efforts should provide a continuum of suitable habitat instead of the patchwork that currently exists.

“If habitat continues to be limited or unavailable, it is unlikely that native populations of salmon will continue to exist into the 21st century.”

From the News Release section on The Normative River, Global Conclusions and Recommendations, the following excerpts are offered:

“We believe that the Council should adopt the salmonid life history ecosystem concept as a guiding foundation... and recognize that salmonid fishes in the Columbia River exist naturally as locally adapted populations (commonly referred to as stocks) and manage for population diversity, not just increased production.

“Restore habitat for all life history stages. Re-regulate reservoir releases into remaining riverine segments to re-establish occasional scouring flows during the spring freshet period to restore channel and floodplain connectivity and to restore the mosaic of riverine habitat structure that has been lost... Recognize estuary and ocean dynamics as controllers of salmon productivity.

“Manage stocks with a more complete understanding of migratory behavior and the limitations that migratory behavior places on modes of river regulation.

“Reduce sources of mortality. Couple seasonality of flow with known effective usage of spill and most efficiently bypass juveniles and adults around mainstem dams. Resolve mortality from gas bubble trauma with focused field research. Harvest man-
LETTERS

We appreciate your viewpoints and comments. Write to us at: Editor, The Osprey, P.O. Box 84211, Seattle 98134.

Editor, The Osprey:

There must be many tardy souls like me—highly respectful of your work, but too sparse in their praise of it. Here's a much-too-late subscription. I suspect that most word-smiths know that significant change seldom occurs in a flash, and that there's no shortcut. It must be said and re-said that one of the world's few remaining resource abundances is on the ropes. If wild salmon are to be saved, they'll be saved by dedicated people such as yourselves. My sincerest praise to all of you.

Pete Broomhall, B.C. Canada

Editor, The Osprey:

Over the years I've very much enjoyed receiving The Osprey. I'm a strong advocate for the removal of both Elwha dams and have also written letters in support of your idea to keep a steelhead hatchery off the Skagit River. I don't fish much any more but, I still am a strong supporter of wild salmon and steelhead.

Thanks, Bob Dalton, Port Angeles, WA

Editor, The Osprey:

I have just read issue #27 of "The Osprey." I especially enjoyed the articles written by Pete Soverel and John Sager. John wrote and outstanding article on the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission.

It is unfortunate that in his attempt to destroy our wildlife program Governor Lowry failed to reappoint Jim Walton from Port Angeles. Jim was our fisheries expert and contributed immensely to the Commission's fisheries decisions. Although retired from the Commission in December of 1995, I still have a keen interest in wildlife issues and really am grateful for your keeping me on your mailing list.

Best Wishes, Norm Richardson, Yakima, WA

Editor's Note: Norm Richardson is a former Fish & Wildlife Commissioner and a strong supporter of wild steelhead recovery.

Editor, The Osprey:

I found little to agree with in John Sager's editorial in the June Newsletter. The recent steelhead decision by the new Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission accomplished as much for conservation as Referendum 45 did in removing politics from fishery management. The decision was driven more by allocation issues then conservation concerns. It merely re-allocated harvest impacts from local fishers to non-local fishers.

If it had been about conservation, then the bag limit change would have been state wide, or at least, covered the entire Olympic Peninsula. The primary effect of this bag limit change will only be to shift local effort to other nearby rivers. Rivers like the Physt, Hoko, Elwha, and Dungeness, where wild steelhead runs are far less numerous and abundant than the Hoh or Quillayute. Perhaps the Commission should have considered this outcome in their rush to "save" the wild steelhead of the Olympic Peninsula.

I do share Mr. Sager's optimism that this decision represents a shift in policy towards more conservative management. However, I hope in the future the Commission takes the time to fully consider all the effects of their proposed management actions. Such as, will this regulatory change produce any real savings of fish, and is this proposed regulatory action enforceable? Basic policy considerations which were missing from the decisions of April 15. After all, Washington State's fishery resources deserve professional care, not special interest.

Craig Bowhay, Port Angeles, WA

Editor, The Osprey:

Gentlemen: I am writing to ask permission to copy an article from The Osprey for distribution to students in my Coastal Stream Management course this fall. The article by Dr. J.R. Karr in issue #26 (Jan. '96), "Thinking About Salmon Landscapes", is one of the finest examples of problem statement (and writing!) that I've ever read.

Sincerely, Larry D. Roelof

Editors Note: Dr. Larry D. Roelof is Professor of Fisheries at Humboldt State University in California.
WILD SALMON CENTER’S

KAMCHATKA STEELHEAD PROJECT
1997 WILDERNESS EXPEDITIONS

Sponsorship:

$6,000

Space is limited.

Itineraries subject to change.

KAMCHATKA, RUSSIA

Last stronghold of
native steelhead.
Uninhabited, remote,
pristine and beautiful
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Steelhead & Atlantic Salmon magazine contains an in-depth article about the 1994 expeditions.
THE LAST NAIL:
WHIRLING DISEASE CONFIRMED IN NORTHWEST STEELHEAD

Readers will recall an article in The Osprey, Issue 24, June 1995, by Montana resident Jerry Kustich, which made us all aware of whirling disease, how is seems to work, and what Montana and Colorado are doing (and not doing) about it. Kustich sounded a much-needed alarm as to the disease’s threat to wild steelhead in west coast Pacific rivers. That alarm was prophetic, as events just one year later now have shown.

As the camel’s nose intrusively pushes aside the tent-flap, whirling disease in autumn 1996 edged its way into Washington state’s extreme southeast corner. And for the first time anywhere, apparently, the disease was confirmed in wild steelhead.

Washington fish and wildlife agents reported in November that WD has been confirmed in the mainstem Grand Ronde River and one of its principal tributaries not far above its mouth (both sites at about river mile four). The Grand Ronde is, of course, a once-fabled steelhead stream whose anadromous denizens travel 400-plus miles from the salt chuck and through seven major dams before getting home. The “Round,” as some call it, is in turn a primary tributary to the Snake River, once the major nursery artery for all Columbia-system wild steelhead. Oregon, which along with California, had earlier reported the presence of WD, holds the majority of the Grand Ronde’s headwaters. Fish health specialists, who have known since 1987 about WD in the upper Ronde and other nearby Snake River tributaries, assume the disease simply moved downstream, inevitably finding its way to the Evergreen State.

A local newspaper account reports that Kevin Amos, Washington state’s top fish health expert said, “there’s no reason to believe the disease will spread rapidly in Washington or that it will do as much damage here as it did in the Rocky Mountain states.”

Oh.

Others don’t agree. One of these is Nick Gayeski, a well-known Washington state steelhead guide, outfitter, occasional participant in FFF Steelhead Committee affairs and now Washington Trout’s natural resources and public outreach coordinator: “The possibility exists that this disease could just devastate wild and even hatchery populations of salmon and steelhead. The consequences could make Montana’s losses pale in comparison.”

Amos also has confirmed that departmental managers were not well prepared for this “discovery.” Notwithstanding their long awareness of WD in Oregon’s part of the Ronde, monitoring for the disease in Washington got underway only in October 1996. The initial “sampling” found WD in five small steelhead, out of a group of thirteen fish.

The Oregonians also have observed WD in chinook salmon, fish notorious for straying into rivers other than those to which they “belong,” where they die and of course release whatever pathogens they may be carrying. The WD spore apparently is an extremely intrusive critter and no one has yet figured out how to stop it. So in these circumstances, Gayeski is absolutely right to call attention to what could happen here; those who incline to call such warnings as unnecessary or “extremist” simply don’t want to deal with reality.

Closely related to this development is a major international conference which took place in Denver in February, this year, devoted for three days entirely to WD. Nearly 300 specialists attended from every state affected by WD (New Zealand and Germany, also); and the expected state and federal government agencies were well represented. (Only two attended from the state of Washington and one of these was a federal official.)

The conference’s 300-plus page proceedings (available from the Colorado Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Unit, Room 201, Wagar Bldg., Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO 80523) cites the disease’s discovery in California and Nevada some 30 years ago. Most states report that WD, although present in their trout populations, has not had the devastating impacts found in Montana and Colorado in recent years.

WD’s nation-wide distribution might come as a surprise: Pennsylvania, Michigan, Ohio, Virginia, West Virginia, Maryland and New York are its eastern hosts. Altogether, the disease has spread to at least 19 states. Nearly all of these report the disease in hatchery populations. Montana’s upper Madison River whose entire wild rainbow population has decreased by 90 percent in just three years is the most spectacular and worrisome example.

The conference’s Proceedings seem to suggest that for all the expertise devoted to the subject, experts really do not understand why WD is disastrous for some populations, (mostly hatchery but apparently occasionally wild), and not to others. For a number of years, many states’ fisheries agencies appeared to be in a state of denial that there was any problem at all. In part, at least, the Denver conference has put an end to the institutional “see-no-evil—“ syndrome and fish health experts are now on notice that user groups and other wild fish advocates no longer will accept the attitude that whirling disease is someone else’s problem. Information sharing and alert preparedness—such as the science will permit—appear to be the watchwords for the few next years.

Clearly, for any state with anadromous rivers, WD will come as a threat for which there are no known sure-fire defenses. Intensive research, beginning with base data collection and evaluation, will be needed. It all takes time, money, consistency and commitment. Personnel and funds are always limited and always devoted to something else which competes with the new threat. Thus the need for strong leadership to determine WD’s threat to steelhead populations; i.e. what kind of priority does WD warrant in a fisheries agency’s workload?

The Osprey urges the leadership of Pacific states’ fisheries agencies to be sure that no rock is left unturned as they ensure that whirling disease will not become the “unexpected” and final nail in the coffin of the steelhead’s struggle for survival. Unlike the accumulated effects of hatcheries, habitat destruction and harvest overkill—which have sneaked up on managers over several de-
decades—the whirling disease problem has received intense focus in only a couple of years (highlighted at the Denver conference) and no one doubts its potential for calamitous results. So our government stewards have been unambiguously forewarned. They had best do all they can, and without delay.

In the meantime, steelhead anglers can and should do all they can to avoid helping spread the little bugger:

- Remove stream-supplied mud and vegetation from boats, motors, waders, anchors, trailers and vehicles.
- Don’t transport live fish, especially bait fish.
- Don’t dispose of entrails or other fish parts into streams or near streams.

It’s the little things that probably make more of a difference than any of us can imagine. Let’s do it right! ▲

County Survey Indicates Overwhelming Support for Protection of Hanford Reach Fish and Wildlife!! Rich Steele

Rich Steele, of the Lower Columbia Basin Audubon Society, is working in central Washington to protect the Hanford Reach of the Columbia River through its inclusion in the Federal Wild and Scenic River System. This has been an ongoing process over many years, but now, even amidst challenging political opinions, more and more individuals are adding their support for fish and wildlife management of the Reach’s rich resources.

The following is a news release in response to the completion of a public opinion poll taken locally this past November and sponsored by the counties and local privatization interests. The results of this poll, although not the results the authors wanted, support on earlier survey done by the Lower Columbia Audubon Society for fish and wildlife protection rather than agricultural and industrial development of the areas no longer managed by the federal government for nuclear development.

The Benton County Planning Department has released its long overdue results of an April 1996 public survey for the future use and disposition of lands within the Hanford Site. The survey indicates that the overwhelming preferences for land use of the Hanford Reach and North Slope are, first: wildlife and fish management, second: recreation, and third: visitor/tourism. The survey also indicates a clear preference for federal control of the Hanford Reach and adjacent lands; federal management authority was the number one preference for the North Slope, Red Zone, River Corridor, and 100 Areas. In contrast, local control and private property were listed as the most undesirable management authorities for these areas. The preferred uses and management authority indicated in the survey describe a Recreational Wild and Scenic River and National Wildlife Refuge, though the survey did not allow the respondent to indicate a desire for these management scenarios. In fact a Recreational Wild and Scenic River and adjacent National Wildlife Refuge are the only means to effectively provide for these preferences.

The survey results not only confirm the findings of the August 1995 scientific poll conducted by Eiland Research and sponsored by Lower Columbia Basin Audubon Society, but also indicate a dramatic increase in public support for wildlife and fish management. (LCBAS Poll ~ keep as wildlife habitat and recreational areas — 66 percent; county survey — use for wildlife and management — 78 percent, using average of North Slope, Red Zone and River Corridor responses).

The county survey also indicates a predominant preference for wildlife and fish management for virtually all undeveloped areas on the Hanford Reservation. Clearly the local community recognizes the incredible fish and wildlife resources of Hanford and calls for their protection and preservation.

We were only provided with a summary version of the report and have had only a few hours to digest the information. We note the survey report itself questions the scientific validity of the methodology used. We are confident that a systematic evaluation of potential survey biases will only further con-
In summary, the survey once again mirrors the voice of the public in calling for the preservation of the Hanford Reach as a Recreational Wild and Scenic River.