



NATIVE FISH SOCIETY

Advancing the Recovery of Native, Wild Fish in Their Homewaters

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Judge sides with wild fish; fewer hatchery salmon to be released this year in the Sandy River

March 21, 2013 (Portland)— Wild spring Chinook in the Sandy River are at less risk after a federal judge's order that will reduce hatchery Chinook releases by more than half.

U.S. District Court Judge Ancer Haggerty's order, released today, rules on a preliminary injunction that requested a halt to this spring's releases of salmon and steelhead from the Sandy River hatchery by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW). The legal action was filed by the Native Fish Society, a non-profit fish conservation group, based in Oregon City.

Judge Haggerty's order restricts ODFW to no more than 132,000 smolt releases in 2013, a dramatic reduction from the 300,000 called for in the hatchery plan. In a preliminary ruling, Judge Haggerty also found that it is likely that the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) violated the Endangered Species Act and the National Environmental Policy Act in approving the Hatchery's operation plans. A final decision on the case will be issued later this year.

Native Fish Society contends that wild salmon in the Sandy River are being overwhelmed by the more than 1.3 million hatchery-grown fish released by the state and federal governments annually.

"Both anecdotal and peer-reviewed scientific evidence show that wild, native fish—Coho, Chinook, and Steelhead—in the Sandy River basin are now overwhelmed by artificially-bred fish produced by hatcheries," says Mike Moody, NFS Executive Director.

NFS, along with McKenzie River Flyfishers, brought this action on behalf of its members, as well as the general public. "As a grass roots advocacy organization, we see it as our responsibility to ensure that laws such as the Endangered Species Act are followed," Moody says. "We do this in order to represent the public interest in matters when our natural resources --- in this case wild, native Coho, Chinook and Steelhead --- are threatened."

The actions brought by NFS focus solely on the hatchery on the Sandy River. It's objective is to recover wild fish. The NFS is not opposed to either recreational or sports fishing, but wants to ensure that the survival and recovery of wild fish is put first as required by law.

The Native Fish Society launched the "Save Sandy Salmon" campaign in 2011. (<http://nativefishsociety.org/index.php/conservation/savesandysalmoncampaign/>). Based on extensive peer-reviewed scientific research conducted over more than three decades, the NFS asserts the following:

- Historically, the cold, pristine waters of the glacier-fed Sandy River system sustained enormous populations of wild native steelhead and salmon. Runs of native fish to the Sandy River basin once ranged as high as 20,000 winter Steelhead, 10,000 spring Chinook, 15,000 Coho, and 10,000 fall Chinook.
- Today, the numbers of wild native fish in this system have declined precipitously. Wild winter steelhead average approximately 700 spawners annually, wild spring Chinook now average approximately 1,000 spawners annually and wild Coho now average approximately 860 spawners annually. The runs of fish returning to the Sandy River basin are now dominated by artificially bred fish produced by the Hatchery.
- Hatchery-bred fish cause significant ecological and reproductive problems for wild fish. Hatchery fish occupy habitat and compete for food needed for wild fish to survive and to spawn, they attract predators and prey on smaller wild fish (both of the same species and of other species), transmit diseases, and compete for spawning grounds.
- Also, when hatchery fish interbreed with wild fish it reduces the genetic fitness of the wild fish for generations afterwards. Steelhead born of hatchery parents in the wild might produce only one-eighth to one-third of the offspring that two breeding wild fish would produce.
- Programs at the hatchery are not conservation programs, but rather are harvest programs used to 1) mitigate loss of fishing and harvest opportunities due to loss of habitat and migration blockage resulting from the Columbia Basin hydropower system, and 2) augment fishing and harvest opportunities on the Sandy River.
- The goal of the hatchery programs is to produce artificially bred fish that will contribute to commercial and sport fisheries in the Columbia River Basin and Sandy River. In no instance has a salmon hatchery restored a depressed wild population to the point where it is self-sustaining. There is little or no evidence that hatcheries have been effective over the long term at assisting in the recovery of wild populations.

Based in Oregon City, OR, **THE NATIVE FISH SOCIETY** is a non-profit public interest organization with more than 700 members. NFS is dedicated to the conservation of native, wild fish in the Pacific Northwest and responsible stewardship of their habitat. Founded in 1995 by noted conservationist Bill Bakke, NFS is guided by the best available science to 1) advocate for abundant wild, native fish and 2) promote the stewardship of the habitats that sustain them. NFS staff, along with its more than 65 River

Steward volunteers, participates in information gathering and dissemination, education and public outreach, monitoring and commenting on proposed agency actions, and other activities related to federal and state management of native fish in Washington, Idaho and Oregon watersheds. NFS believes that an engaged public, focused locally and empowered with scientific data, is at the core of reversing the decline of the Pacific Northwest wild, native fish.