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## Sandy River Hatchery Program is Illegal, Conservation Groups Say

*Native Fish Society, Pacific Rivers Council say state and feds' operations at Sandy River Hatchery harm threatened wild salmon and steelhead, violate the ESA*

PORTLAND, ORE. Hatchery operations on the Sandy River are harming wild salmon and steelhead and violate the federal Endangered Species Act, two conservation groups said today in a 60-Day Notice of Intent to sue state and federal fishery managers. All runs of wild salmon and steelhead in the Sandy are listed for protection under the ESA. Despite removal of two dams and over \$100 million in habitat investment in recent years, wild steelhead and salmon numbers in the Sandy continue to hover at the brink of extinction, while hatchery production remains largely unchanged.

“The impacts from hatchery operations must be addressed if we are genuinely interested in recovering wild fish and rebuilding a world class salmon and steelhead fishery in the Sandy River,” said John Kober, executive director for Pacific Rivers Council.

The Notice filed today by the Native Fish Society and the Pacific Rivers Council outlines two claims of illegal “take” – the ESA term for killing or harming listed species – on wild Sandy River salmon and steelhead from Sandy hatchery operations: 1) harm from hatchery/wild fish interaction between fish released from Sandy Hatchery and Sandy wild fish, and 2) direct illegal killing of wild steelhead for the Sandy Hatchery’s broodstock program and fish collection operations. The Sandy Hatchery is operated by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, and receives funding from National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries).

“There is no ambiguity left on the Sandy. The dams are gone, the habitat is some of the best we have, fishing and logging have all changed for the better, but wild salmon and steelhead are still in trouble. The hatchery is the only factor that has not changed,” said Native Fish Society Executive Director Bill Bakke.

Today, wild steelhead, coho and chinook are at less than 1% of their historical numbers and have continued to decline since they were first listed in 1999. To continue the status quo, ODFW and NOAA Fisheries have lowered the number of wild salmon needed to remove the species from the ESA, but wild fish runs continue to decline well below even that low bar. Today fewer than 650 wild steelhead and 2,000 wild spring chinook return to the Sandy River. On the current trajectory, the Sandy River is following in the footsteps of the Puget Sound rivers that have been closed to all fishing due to precipitously low wild fish numbers.

NOAA Fisheries also violated the ESA by not preparing a biological opinion on the Sandy Hatchery program. “Despite a consensus in this region for protecting and restoring native fish, here is a federally-funded program that even agency scientists acknowledge causes harm to ESA-listed species, but which has not gone through the required environmental reviews,” said Dave Becker, a Portland lawyer who represents the groups. “NOAA Fisheries continues to spend federal money on this hatchery even though it has not evaluated the effects on these

shrinking wild fish populations, and the state continues to trap and collect wild fish without proper ESA permits.”

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