

Action Alert! – Help Protect Icicle Creek

Comments due **DECEMBER 18, 2009**

The Washington Department of Ecology is accepting public comments on its Clean Water Act “certification” for the Leavenworth National Fish Hatchery. These comments are due **December 18, 2009**. The US Environmental Protection Agency will issue a wastewater discharge permit for the facility after Ecology “certifies” that the activities there meet the state’s “water quality standards” by placing conditions on the EPA-issued permit. This “certification” is a powerful tool in that all aspects of the facility can be addressed, not simply the wastewater discharge. **This does not affect the proposal by the Hatchery to rebuild its intake or Structure 2. The public comment period for that will come later.**

Icicle Creek starts high in the spectacular Stuart Range and Alpine Lakes Wilderness, ultimately joining the Wenatchee River near Leavenworth, Washington. It drains 216 square miles of mostly National Forest land and much of that designated Wilderness. The Hatchery has been operating along lower Icicle Creek since 1940 and while it serves important social functions it has also been responsible for unacceptable environmental impacts to Icicle Creek. The Hatchery:

- blocks ESA-listed wild salmon, steelhead, char, and other species from reaching over 150 stream miles of pristine Wilderness habitat;
- diverts water from the stream into a lifeless “canal” without a valid water right at critical low flow periods, depriving a one-mile reach of the river of needed flow.
- withdraws large amounts of water through an unscreened intake, sucking fish into the Hatchery’s plumbing; and
- pollutes Icicle Creek and the Wenatchee River with phosphorus and toxic PCBs.

In its application to Ecology, the Hatchery proposes to keep operating in the same manner that they have been for years: blocking wild fish migration, diverting water, and discharging high levels of phosphorus. Ecology has sufficient information to direct the Hatchery to change operations to protect the river. In 2002, the Hatchery admitted that blockage of upstream fish passage is not required for its operation. Later, the US Fish and Wildlife Service’s analysis of Icicle Creek bull trout migration determined that these threatened fish need to migrate at the exact time the Hatchery blocks the river. But instead of mandating that the stream be opened to allow fish passage, Ecology has called for another study. Moreover, Ecology allows the Hatchery to divert stream water into its canal in order to recharge its wells without ensuring that fish are protected in the section of Icicle Creek adjacent to the Hatchery. The Hatchery is simply asked to “monitor” their phosphorus discharges and is given the entire life of the permit (five years) to finally come into compliance. Ecology should direct the Hatchery to study reducing their production and “recirculation” methods of raising fish which are less polluting.

Tell Ecology that this wild stream, one of the largest Wilderness watersheds in Washington, deserves better. Personalize the sample letter or send it in as it is written (but personalizing it is always better). Put “Leavenworth Fish Hatchery Comments” in the subject of your email. Make sure that you copy your email to the elected and agency officials in the cc list.

Thanks for helping wild fish and the habitats they depend on! Contact Wild Fish Conservancy if you have any questions (mark@wildfishconservancy.org or tyler@wildfishconservancy.org).

