



Wild Fish Conservancy N O R T H W E S T

S C I E N C E E D U C A T I O N A D V O C A C Y

Media Contact:

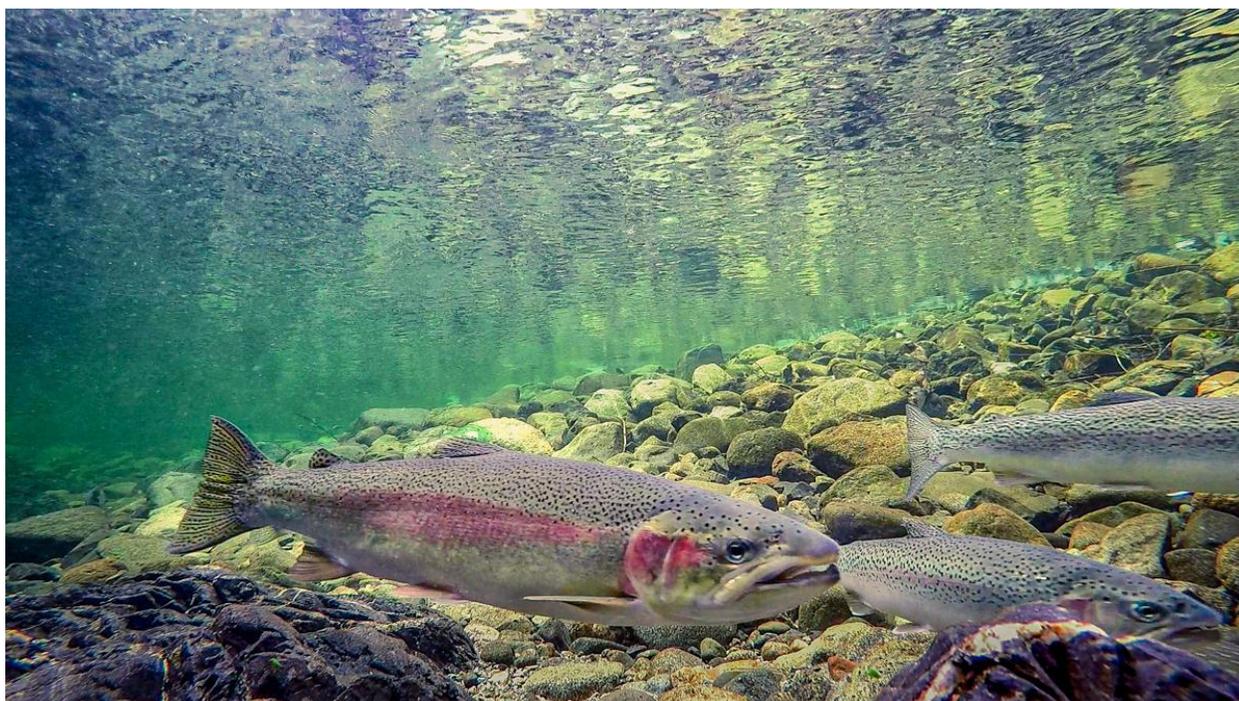
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 12th, 2021

Wild Fish Conservancy Files Legal Suit against Washington Fish and Wildlife for Killing Federally Protected Wild Steelhead



Wild and Hatchery Summer Steelhead in the North Fork Skykomish River

Photo: Russ Ricketts

Olympia, WA – This week Wild Fish Conservancy [filed suit against](#) the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) for violations of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) resulting from its unpermitted operation of a new summer steelhead hatchery program in the Skykomish River.

The complaint charges that WDFW has been capturing, holding captive, and killing protected wild summer steelhead throughout 2019 and 2020, and at present. The Department continues these actions without the federal review and approval required for all hatchery programs that affect threatened and endangered species.

In December, Wild Fish Conservancy provided WDFW with [a 60-day notice of intent to sue](#) over these ongoing violations. During that period, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) released [documents evaluating the proposed hatchery program](#) for public review, confirming that WDFW had not received approval for the new program and were not permitted to kill these ESA-listed fish. A draft [Environmental Assessment](#) has also only recently been released for public comment. To date, at least 52 wild summer steelhead have been captured or killed for this program before the required scientific review and environmental analysis has been completed.

“With the State knowingly breaking the law, they are now asking for the federal agencies to retroactively approve killing wild summer steelhead for an unpermitted hatchery program, preventing wild steelhead from spawning naturally in the river. This is nothing more than reckless management of our last remaining wild summer steelhead.” said Kurt Beardslee, Executive Director of Wild Fish Conservancy.

Over the past thirty years, Puget Sound steelhead have declined at an alarming rate, to the point where their recent abundance is just 3% of what it was in 1900. Today, only five wild summer-run steelhead populations are believed to exist in Puget Sound at present and they are each at the lowest population levels ever recorded.

The state’s Puget Sound Steelhead Advisory Group’s QuickSilver report, which is intended to guide WDFW’s Puget Sound steelhead hatchery and conservation management decisions, commits: “Prior to submitting a steelhead hatchery resource management plan for consideration by NMFS, request review of the proposed program by the [Hatchery Scientific Review Group](#) (or other independent scientific review entity) to evaluate the proposed program and identify potential improvements.” WDFW failed to honor this commitment, which was intended to ensure any new steelhead hatchery program aligns with the best available hatchery reform science.

As a member of the Advisory Group, the Wild Fish Conservancy wrote a [QuickSilver minority report](#) opposing the original plan on the basis of WDFW’s repeated failure to meet science-based conservation, monitoring and adaptive management commitments for existing hatcheries throughout Washington. These failures are exemplified in the state’s own [steelhead at risk report](#), [hatchery reform science in Washington State document](#), and [hatchery and fishery reform policy implementation assessment](#). “WDFW has repeatedly demonstrated it lacks the capacity and will to meet its hatchery science policy commitments and legal obligations to protect wild steelhead. Killing wild summer steelhead for this unpermitted hatchery program is the latest in a long list of examples. There must be accountability.” says Jamie Glasgow, Wild Fish Conservancy’s Science Director.

“WDFW must be held accountable for blatantly operating this program in violation of the Endangered Species Act and other environmental laws”, said Kurt Beardslee. “The pattern and practice of WDFW repeatedly breaking the laws it expects everyone else to follow is unacceptable.”

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[Full complaint \(filed February 10, 2021\)](#)

[60-day Notice \(filed December 2, 2020\)](#)

[Previous Coverage](#)

Wild Fish Conservancy is a nonprofit conservation ecology organization dedicated to preserving, protecting and restoring the northwest’s wild fish and the ecosystems they depend on, through [science](#), [education](#), and [advocacy](#). WFC promotes technically and socially responsible habitat, [hatchery](#) and harvest management to better sustain the region’s wild-fish heritage.

Visit wildfishconservancy.org for more information.

Wild Fish Conservancy is represented in this matter by [Kampmeier & Knutsen, PLLC](#), of Portland, Oregon and Seattle, Washington.