



Wild Fish Conservancy
NORTHWEST
SCIENCE EDUCATION ADVOCACY



Petition to List Olympic Peninsula Steelhead

FAQs

1. Why Did You File the Petition?

- The Conservation Angler and Wild Fish Conservancy filed the petition because the declining trend in Olympic Peninsula steelhead abundance, loss of diversity and spatial distribution combined with multiple threats impacting the species puts them in danger of extinction within the foreseeable future.

2. What is the Status of Olympic Peninsula Steelhead?

- Summer run steelhead are nearly extinct. Snorkel surveys conducted by the National Park Service and steelhead biologist John McMillan indicate that summer run steelhead populations in the Quillayute, Hoh, and Quinault Rivers are at critically low levels of abundance.
- Winter run steelhead are in long-term decline and since 2003, the Queets and Hoh River populations have failed to meet their escapement goals 50% of the time. The Bogachiel and Sol Duc populations have failed to meet their escapement goals in 60% and 70% of the previous ten years, respectively. Many smaller populations are also failing to meet their escapement goals, including some that have not met their goals for 20 years or longer.
- Olympic Peninsula steelhead are losing the diversity critical to their survival: Summer steelhead are nearly extinct, early run winter steelhead are depleted, and repeat spawner rates have decline substantially.

3. What are the Threats to Olympic Peninsula Steelhead?

- Over-forecasts and commercial steelhead harvest has caused the Hoh, Queets, Bogachiel, and Sol Duc winter steelhead populations to miss their escapement goals, and a massive influx of anglers has produced very high levels of catch and release, the impacts of which are completely unknown.
- Winter run hatchery programs and the fisheries they support(ed) have depleted formerly abundant early winter run steelhead. Additionally, the percentage of hatchery summer run steelhead spawning in the wild exceeds genetic and ecological standards deemed necessary to protect wild populations.
- Historic and ongoing logging operations and roads have degraded habitat in many ways, some of which included increased frequency of mass wasting events, which in turn have inundated rivers and creeks with excessive supplies of sediment, increased channelization, and disconnection from floodplains, reduced the amount and recruitment of large wood, and increased stream temperatures and reduced levels of dissolved oxygen.

- Climate change is altering freshwater and marine habitat in ways that will be deleterious to the persistence of wild steelhead. For example, climate change has resulted in an increase in peak flow events and a substantial decrease in summer streamflows. Further, many glaciers have disappeared, and those that remain are predicted to meet the same fate in the coming decades. Climate impacts have also altered the ocean by increasing water temperatures and are likely to produce more extreme events in the future that could further alter the annual cycles of upwelling and the overall food web in the North Pacific.

4. How Would an ESA Listing Benefit Olympic Peninsula Steelhead?

- National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) would designate critical habitat for Olympic Peninsula Steelhead.
- NMFS would develop a recovery plan describing the site-specific management actions needed to achieve the goal of delisting the species, measurable criteria for meeting that goal, and estimates of the time and cost to carry out those management actions.
- If listed as a “threatened” species, NMFS will establish protective rules it deems necessary and advisable to conserve Olympic Peninsula steelhead. For example, these rules should include requirements for federal review of certain state and tribal fish management plans for harvest and hatchery practices.
- Other federal agencies, including but not limited to the U.S. Forest Service and National Park Service, would be required to consult with NMFS to ensure their activities and those they fund or authorize do not jeopardize the continued existence of the species.

5. When Will the National Marine Fisheries Service Issue a Decision?

- To the maximum extent practicable, NMFS must issue a finding on whether listing Olympic Peninsula *may* be warranted on or before October 29, 2022, which is 90 days from the date we filed the petition.
- If NMFS determines that listing may be warranted, NMFS will perform a status review of Olympic Peninsula steelhead and determine whether listing species is indeed warranted. NMFS should make that determination on or before July 31, 2023, which is 12 months from the date we filed the petition.

6. What is the goal?

- To enable bold actions that will turn the tide on a long-term decline and restore healthy and abundant wild steelhead populations that will sustain responsible tribal and recreational fisheries into the future.

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