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Lawsuit Filed Over Delay of Federal Protections for Olympic Peninsula Steelhead

Edmonds, WA – On January 17, 2025, The Conservation Angler and Wild Fish Conservancy [sued](#) the National Marine Fisheries Service (“NMFS”) for delaying Endangered Species Act (“ESA”) protections for Olympic Peninsula steelhead.

Olympic Peninsula steelhead are a distinct population segment of steelhead that occur in the remote northwest corner of Washington State. Once numbering in the tens of thousands, Olympic Peninsula steelhead have steadily declined throughout their range for decades. The species faces multiple threats, including commercial harvest, mismanaged recreational fisheries, hatchery operations, legacy and contemporary effects from logging, and climate change.



Photo of juvenile Olympic Peninsula steelhead by © John McMillan

On August 1, 2022, The Conservation Angler and Wild Fish Conservancy [submitted a petition](#) to list Olympic Peninsula steelhead under the ESA. In response to the petition, NMFS found that Olympic Peninsula steelhead may warrant protection under the ESA. This finding triggered NMFS’s non-

discretionary duty under the ESA to determine whether the species warrants such protection within 12-months of the date it received the petition (i.e., August 1, 2023).

After making its [initial finding](#), NMFS conducted a scientific status review to evaluate the condition of Olympic Peninsula steelhead. In October 2024, NMFS released a [status review report](#), which found that Olympic Peninsula are at moderate risk of extinction.

However, as of January 17, 2025, NMFS still had not issued the statutorily required 12-month finding, which by that point, was **536 days late**. The Conservation Angler and Wild Fish Conservancy filed this suit to cause NMFS to issue this overdue determination.

“We didn’t work our tails off on the petition only to settle for a status review memo that validates our arguments for listing Olympic Peninsula steelhead. With this lawsuit, we will ensure that NMFS finishes the job by issuing its long-overdue listing determination,” said John McMillan, President of The Conservation Angler.

“The last thing we want is to be spending time litigating, but the urgency of this issue gives us no alternative. The federal government must act without delay to complete this critical review so that the benefits of recovery planning can finally reach these Olympic Peninsula steelhead,” says Emma Helverson, Executive Director of Wild Fish Conservancy. “Every day of inaction allows the threats facing these fish to intensify, making their survival and recovery even harder to achieve.”

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Further Reading:

- [Complaint Filed January 17, 2025](#)
- [Sixty-Day Notice of Intent to Sue filed November 7, 2024](#)
- [Petition to List Olympic Peninsula Steelhead as a Threatened or Endangered Distinct Population Segment | NOAA Fisheries](#)
- [Press Release: Lawsuit Launched to Protect Olympia Peninsula Steelhead | The Conservation Angler and Wild fish Conservancy \(November 8, 2024\)](#)

The Conservation Angler and Wild Fish Conservancy are represented by Kampmeier and Knutsen, PLLC and The Conservation Angler’s Legal and Policy Director Rob Kirschner. kampmeierknutsen.com

Wild Fish Conservancy is a nonprofit conservation organization headquartered in Washington State and working from California to Alaska to preserve, protect and restore the northwest’s wild fish and the ecosystems they depend on, through science, education, and advocacy. wildfishconservancy.org

The Conservation Angler fights for the protection of wild Pacific anadromous fish populations and their watersheds throughout the Pacific Northwest and Russia’s Kamchatka Peninsula. theconservationangler.org