



For Immediate Release, November 8, 2024

Contacts:

Rob Kirschner, The Conservation Angler, (503) 894-0439, rob@theconservationangler.org

Emma Helverson, Wild Fish Conservancy, (484) 788-1174, emma@wildfishconservancy.org

Lawsuit Launched to Protect Olympic Peninsula Steelhead

Port Angeles, WA – The Conservation Angler and Wild Fish Conservancy **recently notified** the National Marine Fisheries Service (“NMFS”) of their intent to sue NMFS for failing to protect Olympic Peninsula steelhead under the federal Endangered Species Act (“ESA”).

In August 2022, The Conservation Angler and Wild Fish Conservancy **filed a petition** to list Olympic Peninsula steelhead under the ESA. The petition provides substantial scientific evidence demonstrating that Olympic Peninsula steelhead are at risk of becoming an endangered species within the foreseeable future. The summer-run component is nearly extinct, and the winter-run component is declining and losing its life history diversity. The fate of the species now rests on a depressed and contracted mid- to late-spring component of wild fish whose productivity is limited or declining depending on the population. The remnants of these runs that historically numbered in the tens of thousands face declining freshwater and marine habitat conditions, increasing recreational fishing pressure, and ongoing commercial harvest. Because of these and other demographic and ecological threats, Olympic Peninsula steelhead are likely to become endangered within the foreseeable future.

“I have spent the last twenty-five years of my life studying and fishing for Olympic Peninsula steelhead,” said John McMillan, Science Director for The Conservation Angler. “The best available scientific data supports what I’ve witnessed first-hand – these remarkable steelhead are in long-term decline and losing the critical life history diversity they need to adapt to climate change. It is imperative that NMFS afford ESA protections to these remarkable fish before it is too late.”

In February 2023, NMFS found that listing Olympic Peninsula steelhead under the ESA may be warranted. As a result, NMFS was required to determine whether listing these steelhead is indeed warranted by August 2023. However, NMFS has not made that determination and, as a result, it is violating its duty to ensure Olympic Peninsula steelhead receive protections they are afforded by law.

“The ESA includes mandatory deadlines for a reason, and Olympic Peninsula steelhead do not have time for further delay,” said Emma Helverson, Executive Director for the Wild Fish Conservancy. “Because the best available scientific data supports listing these fish, NMFS should immediately issue its listing determination.”

###

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