



Background

Populations of coho salmon (*Oncorhynchus kisutch*) that occur in coastal watersheds between Seaside and Cape Blanco are being evaluated by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries for listing under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA). These populations, which have been designated a single Evolutionarily Significant Unit (ESU), have been the focus of a considerable conservation effort by the State of Oregon, local and private entities, and federal management partners. Much of this conservation effort has been developed and implemented under a planning framework called the Oregon Plan for Salmon and Watersheds (Oregon Plan). The Oregon Plan brings together various governmental and non-governmental entities to implement conservation strategies for fish populations throughout Oregon, including those belonging to the Oregon Coastal Coho ESU. In this context, the Oregon Plan refers to the broad suite of conservation efforts implemented to improve the status of coho and their watersheds, e.g., harvest, hatcheries, habitat, etc.

The Coastal Coho Project and the Coho Assessment

The State of Oregon, in partnership with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), initiated a collaborative project to address the conservation of coastal coho on the Oregon coast. The primary objectives of the Coastal Coho Project are to:

1. Assess Oregon Plan efforts to conserve and rebuild coastal coho populations.
2. Use the assessment to inform NOAA Fisheries' status review listing determination.
3. Use the assessment as a foundation for developing a conservation and recovery plan for coastal coho.
4. In the event that NOAA Fisheries determines to list this ESU as threatened, use the assessment as a basis to seek legal assurances for those carrying out activities that are consistent with the Oregon Plan.

Volume 2 is an executive summary of Oregon's assessment of the Oregon Coastal Coho Evolutionarily Significant Unit (ESU) that addresses objective two above.

The Coho Assessment Process

The framework for this Assessment included developing measurable criteria to define population and ESU viability, utilizing the best available information to evaluate fish status relative to these criteria, identifying key factors likely responsible for the evaluation result, assessing the implementation certainty and effectiveness of conservation efforts to address factors for decline and potential threats to viability, and concluding with Oregon's overall evaluation of what threats to this ESU remain and what the significance of those threats is in terms of risk to viability.

To accomplish this, various types of data were examined, including: fish abundance and distribution; marine survival; fishery harvest; hatchery programs; stream complexity; riparian condition; water quality; streamflow; fish passage (access to spawning and rearing streams); predation; fish disease; and exotic fish species. These data represent available information collected both before and after the formal implementation of the Oregon Plan in 1997.

The State of Oregon has conducted this comprehensive assessment of the status of the fish, the status of freshwater habitat that supports the species' life cycle, and the ongoing conservation efforts for this ESU in order to inform the continued management programs and activities. The results of this Assessment are intended also to inform the federal government's listing decision. Oregon's assessment includes:

1. An evaluation of the biological viability (sustainability) of the ESU.
2. Identification of key risk factors that contributed to the past decline of coho or threaten coho viability in the foreseeable future.
3. A determination of the current levels of risk to ESU viability presented by these key risk factors.
4. An evaluation of the status and trends of management programs, restoration work, habitat, and other conditions in place to address these risk factors and maintain or enhance the continued viability of the ESU.

The Coho Assessment will Inform Recovery Planning

The Coastal Coho ESU Assessment is the starting point for more effective future restoration investment, monitoring, and adaptive management action.

Regardless of the current ESA listing decision, Oregon, in partnership with NOAA Fisheries and interested stakeholders, will continue the ongoing process of completing a full conservation/recovery plan. This plan builds upon the Assessment to establish goals beyond the threshold of viability, focuses management actions on the primary limiting threats to reaching those goals, and establishes a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation program for adaptive management. The draft conservation/recovery plan is scheduled to be completed by the end of 2006.