

## USFWS TO CONDUCT BULL TROUT REVIEW

ID, MT, OR, WA

## GROUPS CRITICIZE CENSORED ANALYSIS

The US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) released a draft analysis (April 5, 2004) of the potential economic impacts of a proposal to designate critical habitat for bull trout in the Columbia and Klamath River basin. Bull trout are listed as threatened species under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA). The draft economic analysis, prepared by Bioeconomics Incorporated of Missoula, Montana, estimates that protecting bull trout and their habitat in the Columbia and Klamath basins could potentially have economic impacts of \$230 to \$300 million over the next 10 years. The critical habitat proposal for the Columbia River Basin includes parts of Oregon, Washington, Idaho and Montana. The proposal for bull trout in the Klamath River Basin includes a small part of the Klamath basin in Oregon. USFWS has proposed to designate 18,471 miles of streams and 532,721 acres of lakes and reservoirs in Oregon, Washington, Idaho and Montana as critical habitat for the Columbia and Klamath basin populations of bull trout.

USFWS also announced in the Federal Register (April 13, 2004) that it is conducting a 5-year review of bull trout. The 5-year review, required for all ESA-listed species, will assess the best available information on how bull trout have fared since being listed for protection in 1999. This will include analyses of population data and threats to the species. "The purpose of the review is to ensure that the species has the appropriate level of protection under the ESA," said Dave Allen, USFWS Regional Director, Pacific Region. "Reviewing the latest information will also lead to better management and improved conservation of the species." USFWS has acknowledged that five-year reviews have been rare, but that the Interior Department agreed to this one at the request of Idaho Governor Dirk Kempthorne and the Idaho Congressional delegation.

The review considers the best scientific and commercial data that have become available since the listing determination, such as species biology; habitat conditions; threat status and trends; and other new information. If USFWS finds that a change in the species' classification is warranted, the agency may separately propose to reclassify or de-list bull trout. If USFWS does propose a change, it would go through a separate rule-making process, including public review and comment (see ESA § 4(a)).

Pending completion of the 5-year review, USFWS is temporarily suspending work on the draft Recovery Plan chapters for the Columbia River (WA, OR, ID and MT), Klamath River (Oregon), and St. Mary-Belly River (Montana) distinct population segments of bull trout, which were released in November 2002. USFWS will continue to finalize the draft Recovery Plan chapters for the Jarbidge (Nevada) and Coastal-Puget Sound (Washington) population segments and release them for public comment this spring to ensure that all the population segments have draft Recovery Plan chapters provided for public review. After the public comment period has closed for these latter two chapters, further work on them will also be suspended pending completion of the 5-year review.

In January 2002, USFWS and the Alliance for the Wild Rockies (AWR) and Friends of the Wild Swan (the Friends) reached a court settlement establishing a schedule for the proposal of critical habitat for bull trout. The two environmental groups sued the USFWS for not designating critical habitat after listing bull trout in 1999 as threatened.

Bull trout critical habitat work is continuing on a revised schedule. USFWS' agreement with the AWR and the Friends calls for a final designation of critical habitat for the Columbia and Klamath River population segments to be completed by September 2004. Proposed critical habitat for the Jarbidge, St. Mary-Belly, and Coastal-Puget Sound population segments will be released for public comment in late June or early July 2004. Final critical habitat for these population segments will be designated in June 2005.

USFWS is asking anyone with new scientific or commercial information concerning the status of the bull trout to submit it to John Young, Bull Trout Coordinator, Attn: 5-year Review, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Ecological Services, 911 NE 11th Avenue, Portland, Oregon 97232, Fax: 503/ 231-6243, or email: R1BullTrout5Y@r1.fws.gov.

Meanwhile, AWR and the Friends of the Friends have criticized USFWS for censoring the economic analysis prepared by Bioeconomics. AWR and the Friends have demanded that USFWS release the complete cost-benefit analysis for designating critical habitat for bull trout in a letter to the agency.

"The Fish and Wildlife Service misled the American public when they released their censored version of this economic analysis last week," said Michael Garrity, Executive Director of AWR. The cost-benefit analysis the government released did not include 59 pages of benefits in the original cost-benefit analysis. "Federal Agencies are required by law to provide an assessment of cost and benefits of proposed regulatory actions. The law does not allow the government to ignore the benefits if they don't get the result they want. A cost-benefit analysis means what it says, you have to look at both the costs and the benefits," Garrity charged. USFWS' draft Economic Analysis is posted at: <http://pacific.fws.gov/bulltrout/>.

According to Garrity, a part of the benefit analysis not released by USFWS found that protection for the bull trout would benefit irrigators since work to restore the fishery would result in more water later in the year. This effect would occur due to a reduction in logging and better watershed protection measures designed to protect the bull trout. Garrity also pointed out that there would be enormous benefits to municipal watersheds. "For example, 80% of Oregon's drinking water comes from watersheds that are located in US Forest Service lands. Protection for bull trout would allow tremendous savings for municipalities that won't need to implement water treatment measures."

**For info:** Joan Jewett, USFWS, 503/ 231-6121, website: <http://news.fws.gov/newsreleases/default.cfm?region=1>; Michael Garrity, AWR, 406/ 459 5936, website: [www.wildrockiesalliance.org/](http://www.wildrockiesalliance.org/)