

9. North Washington Coast Winter Steelhead – (Briefing)

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“GREEN SHEET”

Meeting: October 8, 2011, Commission Meeting

Agenda item #9: North Washington Coast Winter Steelhead – (Briefing)

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Presenter(s): Ron Warren, Regional Fish Program Manager, Fish Program

Background:

The Fish and Wildlife Commission has requested a briefing on north Washington coast winter steelhead. This briefing will describe the stock status of steelhead on the north coast within the context of the Statewide Steelhead Management Plan, the status of the Snider Creek Hatchery Program and the Department’s management of Infectious Hematopoietic Necrosis virus (IHNV) in hatchery steelhead stocks.

North Washington Coast winter steelhead populations are a culturally and economically important grouping of stocks, and are some of the state’s healthiest populations of steelhead. The rivers include the Quillayute, Hoh, Queets and Quinault. Various portions of these river systems offer anglers the opportunity to fish for and retain their “one wild steelhead per year.” The eight rivers that we allow wild retention are: the Bogachiel, Calawah, Dickey, Sol Duc, and the Quillayute in the Quillayute system; the Hoh, the Clearwater, in the Queets, and the Quinault Rivers.

The North Coast winter steelhead stocks are all considered healthy. The 2010-2011 returns were strong in all North Coast systems, with resulting estimates of escapement that are well above the established goals.

The Statewide Steelhead Management Plan was adopted in March 8, 2008 to provide a framework for management of steelhead populations throughout Washington. With the highest priority placed on the protection of wild steelhead stocks the plan emphasizes the need to develop a “network of wild stock gene banks ... where wild stocks are largely protected from the effects of hatchery programs. At least one wild stock gene bank will be established for each major population group in each steelhead DPS.”

Unique programs have been initiated over the years to enhance harvest opportunity while minimizing impacts to wild populations. One such project was entered into 25 year ago. A cooperative agreement with the Olympic Peninsula Guides Association (OPGA) on June 17, 1986,

“to provide a maximum of 100,000 winter steelhead smolts of wild Soleduck River stock annually for release into the Soleduck River. These fish shall be reared to release size (larger than 10 fish / pound) on OPGA managed facilities

and are to be used to produce additional harvestable adult steelhead for commercial and sport fishermen on the Quillayute River system. Returning adults from this project will be considered hatchery fish for the purposes of harvest management.”

The Department has been conducting a public process to review the Snider Creek hatchery program and has developed several management options. An update on the process and final outcome for the program will be presented.

IHNv is a rhabdovirus that causes significant disease and associated economic loss in Pacific salmon, steelhead and trout . WDFW first began sampling hatchery broodstocks for viral pathogens in the late 1970’s. Currently we sample approximately 30,000 juvenile and adult salmonids annually for viral pathogens including IHNv. Every WDFW hatchery broodstock is tested annually for the presence of regulated finfish pathogens including IHNv. With the recent detection of IHNv on the coast WDFW has continued to work within the fish health community as well with other resource managers to assure proper communication is occurring prior to any resulting actions being taken.

The management of steelhead has many challenges from population assessments to the accurate measurement of fishing effort. The continued conservative approach to management through forecasting and harvest opportunity will ensure sustainable populations into the future.

Policy issues:

None at this time; informational briefing only.

Public involvement process and outcome:

NA – Informational briefing only

Action requested:

None at this time; informational briefing only.

Draft motion language:

NA – Informational briefing only.

Justification for Commission Action:

NA – Informational briefing only.

Communications Plan:

Form updated 04/26/2010 - sdy

