



Fish and Wildlife Commission Presentation Summary Sheet

Meeting date:

10/27/2023

Agenda item:

Petition: Statewide Protection of Resident Forms of Wild Steelhead - (Decision)

Presenter(s):

Kirt Hughes - Fish Management, Division Manager

Background summary:

The Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission received a petition requesting the Commission provide “statewide protection of resident forms of wild steelhead” (attached). The petition is specific to resident rainbow trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) in locations where they may directly contribute to the anadromous form of *O. mykiss* – a.k.a. steelhead. The petition explicitly calls out the period where both juvenile wild steelhead and returning adults are present in rivers, streams, and their tributaries. The petitioner’s proposal offers the following four rules:

- Statewide year-round Catch-and-Release (all size wild trout) in rivers and streams for all watersheds with wild steelhead
- Statewide year-round Selective Gear Rules (all size wild trout) in rivers and streams in all watersheds with wild steelhead
- Closed Waters: Selected sections of rivers designated as Wild Steelhead Gene Banks
- Closed Waters: Watersheds with wild steelhead runs under escapement

Staff met with representatives for the petitioners on two occasions since receipt of the petition. In those meetings we asked for clarification and a more detailed understanding of the basis for their proposal. The response generally indicated that their concerns were largely related to the potential benefit of resident rainbow trout contributing to anadromous “steelhead” (*O. mykiss*) life-history.

The petitioners cite the Department’s Basic Stream Management Strategy written in 1984 (stream strategy); which is the basis for the current trout management and fishing rules adopted by the Fish and Wildlife Commission. The petitioners state that the current rules are insufficient, and therefore create a need for additional measures to protect resident trout.

The Department manages wild resident trout with a variety of fishing regulations to provide fishing opportunity while meeting conservation objectives. The stream strategy is the foundation for wild trout regulation, however, since then the department has implemented additional site-specific rules to provide additional protection where needed. As a result, the regulatory landscape for management of these species, across the state, is both sophisticated and can be complicated.

Given the current status, WDFW staff recommend that the Fish and Wildlife Commission deny the petition and direct staff to develop a native resident trout harvest management policy to guide staff for future rule-making.

If the commission accepts the staff recommendation, we will bring a proposed outline and timeframe to a future meeting of the fish committee for review.

Staff recommendation:

Deny the petition and direct staff to initiate development of a native resident trout harvest management policy for commission review and adoption.

Policy issue(s) and expected outcome:

Management of recreational fisheries for native resident trout throughout Washington is complex and must address potential conservation and population rebuilding needs in various waters statewide as well as providing fishing opportunities while meeting conservation objectives.

Fiscal impacts of agency implementation:

None

Public involvement process used and what you learned:

As this is a rule-making petition, aside from communication with the petitioners, no public engagement has occurred to date.

Action requested and/or proposed next steps:

Deny the petition and direct staff to initiate development of a native resident trout harvest management policy for commission review and adoption.

A Native Resident Trout Harvest Management Policy would provide staff guidance for future rule-making.

Draft motion language:

MOTION LANGUAGE – I move to deny the petition and direct staff to develop a Commission policy for resident native trout harvest management.

Post decision communications plan:

Commission staff will provide a letter to the petitioners with the outcome of the Commission decision regarding the petition.
