



**State of Washington**

**DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE**

Habitat Program: 600 Capitol Way N, Olympia, Washington 98501-1091 - (360) 902-2534

**DETERMINATION OF SIGNIFICANCE  
AND REQUEST FOR COMMENTS ON SCOPE OF EIS**

**Name of Proposal:** THE WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE CONSERVATION AND RECOVERY PLAN FOR ROCKFISH IN PUGET SOUND.

**Description of Proposal:** The Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife is developing a conservation plan for rockfish (*Sebastes* spp) in Puget Sound, Washington. This plan will address harvest, monitoring, education, and habitat actions needed for stock preservation and recovery. The intent of the proposal is to conserve the rockfish of Puget Sound, rebuild abundance when needed and provide sustainable fishing opportunities.

The plan is a non-project policy document that will address potential environmental impacts of policies and strategies designed to preserve and restore rockfish populations in Puget Sound.

**Proponent:** Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

**Location of Proposal, including street, if any:** Puget Sound Washington. The waters included are the Strait of Juan de Fuca, San Juan Islands, Hood Canal, Port Susan, Saratoga Pass, Admiralty Inlet, and the central/southern Puget Sound basins south to Olympia.

**Affected Counties:** Whatcom, San Juan, Skagit, Island, Snohomish, King, Pierce, Thurston, Kitsap, Mason, Clallam and Jefferson

**Lead Agency:** Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW)

**EIS Required.** WDFW has determined that this proposal may have a significant adverse impact on the environment. An environmental impact statement (EIS) is required under RCW 43.21C.030(2)(c) and will be prepared.

**The lead agency had identified the following areas for discussion in the EIS:**

**Purpose:**

WDFW will develop a plan that contains policies, strategies, and actions intended to improve the abundance, productivity, and biological diversity of rockfish in Puget Sound.

Sustainable management of both the rockfish resource and fishing in Puget Sound requires that WDFW balance varied public needs and expectations to maintain and restore natural stocks of rockfish, support tribal and recreational harvest opportunities, and enhance other important social and environmental issues. This plan will examine existing activities in the agency and propose new actions consistent with the guidance provided by the agency's enabling legislation, mission statement, strategic goals and objectives, and existing policies adopted by the Fish and Wildlife Commission.

**Need:**

This plan is needed to restore and protect the diversity and long-term productivity of rockfish populations in Puget Sound. Rockfish are a very slow growing, long-lived group of fish. With few exceptions, rockfish tend to be sedentary species. These characteristics make rockfish vulnerable to overfishing and once overfishing has occurred, recovery can take decades. In the 1970's and 1980's harvest of rockfish, by both commercial and recreational fisheries greatly increased. While the harvest has been greatly curtailed by regulation, populations of several species of rockfish are at low levels and are being evaluated for possible protection under the federal Endangered Species Act. It is unclear if the current protections are sufficient to protect the rockfish in Puget Sound and allow rebuilding. While it is clear that several species of rockfish in Puget Sound are in need of rebuilding, several strategies could be employed with the intent of rebuilding stocks. The plan will evaluate the possible strategies and propose alternatives for consideration

**Goals:**

- Goals may include providing sustainable recreational fishing opportunities consistent with rockfish conservation objectives.
- WDFW intends to work with tribal governments to ensure that management objectives are met, including ceremonial and subsistence utilization and to ensure other cultural and ecological values are sustained.
- WDFW intends to develop a plan that will guide the evaluation and application of hatchery, harvest, enforcement, habitat, and education programs to aid in the restoration of rockfish stocks in Puget Sound.

**Strategies and Alternatives:**

The strategies developed in this plan must meet the stated objectives. Several alternative strategies will be considered during the development of this plan. These alternatives may include:

1. Management of harvest to meet rebuilding objectives.
  - a. Manage harvest to allow rebuilding at the most rapid rate possible.
  - b. Manage harvest to allow rebuilding, but reduce the impacts on existing fisheries.
  - c. Manage rebuilding to minimize the impacts on existing fisheries.
2. Consideration of climate change when developing rebuilding strategies.
  - a. Proactively consider the impacts of potential climate change when developing rebuilding strategies.

- b. Consider climate change only when clear evidence indicates that climate change has occurred in Puget Sound.
  - c. Ignore potential effects of climate change when designing rebuilding strategies.
3. Identification of needed research and monitoring programs.
- a. Design monitoring and research programs to consider all stages of rockfish life history, ecological role, and their habitat utilization.
  - b. Design monitoring programs that consider only the adult life stages of rockfish.
  - c. Design monitoring programs only for those species of rockfish that are important to existing fisheries.
  - d. Maintain existing research and monitoring programs.

**Possible Performance Criteria:**

Alternate rockfish management strategies may be evaluated based on the following possible criteria:

- Cost required to implement strategies.
- Evaluation of the impacts of potential environmental changes on rockfish.
- Impact on nontreaty fisheries and values.
- Impact on tribal fisheries and values.

**Scoping.** Agencies, affected tribes and members of the public are invited to comment on the scope of the EIS. You may comment on alternatives, mitigation measures, probable impacts, and licenses or other approvals that may be required. The method and deadline for giving us your comments is:

**Written comments should be received at the address listed below no later than June 18, 2008.**

When you send us your comments, please provide the name of proposal in your comment letter and mail it to:

**Responsible Official:** Teresa A. Eturaspe

**Position/Title:** SEPA/NEPA Coordinator, Regulatory Services Section

**Address:** 600 Capitol Way North, Olympia, WA 98501

You can also send your comments via email to: [SEPAdesk@dfw.wa.gov](mailto:SEPAdesk@dfw.wa.gov)

***Please place your name in the subject of the email, example:***

***“T. Smith\_ Rockfish Recovery Plan”***

You can also send you comments via fax to: (360) 902-2946.

If you have questions about details of the proposal, contact: Marine Ecosystem Manager, Greg Bargmann at 360-902-2825 or by e-mail at [bargmggb@dfw.wa.gov](mailto:bargmggb@dfw.wa.gov)

If you have questions about the scoping process, please contact:

Teresa A. Eturaspe **Phone:** (360) 902-2575 **Fax:** (360) 902-2946 or

**email:** [SEPAdesk@dfw.wa.gov](mailto:SEPAdesk@dfw.wa.gov)

**DATE OF ISSUE:** May 28, 2008

**SIGNATURE:**

*Teresa A. Eturaspe*

SEPA Log Number: 08 -034. Scoping/DS