

## **Endangered Species? Big steelhead**

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By Scott Rebstock

Siskiyou County, Calif. - Of the 11 native fish species found in the Mount Shasta region, seven face a substantial risk of extinction within the next century, a report released today by UC Davis professor Dr. Peter Moyle claims.

The report, commissioned by California Trout, is entitled "SOS: California's Native Fish Crisis." It goes on to state that if present trends continue, 65 percent of California's native salmon, steelhead and trout species will be extinct within 100 years. And of the state's nine living native inland fish, the report says, 78 percent are in danger of extinction, the report claims.

California Trout Mount Shasta Program Manager Curtis Knight said the report's findings will hardly come as a surprise to local anglers and wildlife advocates, and that the time to act is now.

"Most people have a sense of this, but this is the first time an objective study has been done on such a large scale," Knight said.

The report evaluates 32 native fish species and sub-species, giving each a score of 1-5 to indicate its likelihood of long-term survival under current conditions. A score of 1 indicates the species is highly vulnerable to extinction, and a score of 5 was given to species with expanding populations and no extinction risk, according to the study. Knight added that one benefit of the study is it identifies how these trends can be fought, preserving both the environment and the economy, which in Siskiyou County depends on healthy streams and rivers to promote "ecotourism" – a CalTrout report released in January shows that over \$2 billion is spent in California by anglers on fishing-related items and activities. According to the report, fish species most at risk in Siskiyou County are the Klamath River spring run Chinook salmon and coho salmon in the Shasta and Scott rivers along with the McCloud River redband trout, which subsist in small streams on the southeast slopes of Mount Shasta.

### **McCloud River redband trout**

According to the report, the minimum total population of redband trout today is probably more than 1,000 adults, and their high hybridization risk with rainbow trout requires continual monitoring and habitat improvement. They are listed by the state as a "species of special concern." Moyle rated redband's longterm survival chances as a 2 – "poor." Logging, grazing and angling pressure are other factors affecting their status, Moyle says in the study.

### **Upper Klamath-Trinity rivers spring Chinook salmon**

Once found throughout the Klamath River as well as the Salmon, Scott, Shasta, South Fork and North Fork Trinity rivers, their distribution is now restricted to

below dams that block access to the upper Klamath and Trinity rivers, the report says.

The Chinook populations in these rivers have been affected by logging, mining, rural development, fisheries, hatcheries and disease, and Moyle suggests that reforming commercial timber harvesting practices and motorized instream gold mining activities would increase habitat availability for these fish, whose overall status is listed in the report as 2 - "poor."

### **Southern Oregon/Northern California Coast coho salmon**

Major California river systems with these fish include the Smith, Klamath, Trinity, Mad, Eel and Mattole Rivers, plus Redwood Creek. According to Knight, coho used to thrive in the Shasta and Scott rivers, with runs historically numbering between 3,000 and 25,000. In recent years, Knight said, as few as 50 coho salmon have returned to the Shasta River.

Local groups have disputed the historic abundance of coho in the Klamath River system, however.

One major factor for these streams is water temperature – coho need cool water to survive, and factors such as dams and water diversions, Moyle says, cause water temperature to rise, making it harder for these fish to survive. Their chances for survival are also listed at level 2 – "poor."

"Most or all populations in small coastal streams will likely disappear in the next 25 to 50 years," Moyle states in the report.

Knight was quick to point out that the report should not be viewed solely as "doom and gloom."

"I think there's a huge potential to turn this trend around," he said.

One major recommendation made in the report is to work toward increased funding for the California Department of Fish and Game (DFG) to enable the agency to provide better field management and to increase staffing.

CalTrout and other wildlife advocacy groups regularly present Sacramento policymakers with data and reports, hoping to garner more funding for the DFG. Knight added that the community has a role to play as well.

"This is not a case of 'if the government did their job, everything would be all right,'" he said. "It's on us to come up with creative, collaborative solutions to get this stuff done."

One such collaboration was when Sierra Pacific partnered with CalTrout to help restore McCloud redband trout habitats on land owned by the logging company.

Together, they were able to complete a culvert project that almost doubled the redband population in the area.

“These are non-traditional partnerships that make a lot of sense,” Knight said of the project, adding that funding and opportunity exists for other companies, as well as farmers and ranchers, to use land and water more efficiently. “The fisheries in this region are famous around the world; both our environment and our local economies will benefit from increased efforts to ensure the survival of our native trout, salmon and steelhead species.”