



Endangered Species Act Alert 2000-4

**RE: U.S Fish and Wildlife Service Delays Decision on Listing Coastal
Cutthroat Trout; Refuses to List Westslope Cutthroat Trout**

DATE: April 18, 2000

On April 11, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) delayed deciding whether coastal cutthroat trout in Southwest Washington/Columbia River should be protected as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. A decision is expected by October 5. On a related note, on April 14, the USFWS refused to list the westslope cutthroat trout as a threatened species on the basis that its presence in 23,000 miles of streams and rivers in the Northwest combined with the State of Montana's continuing efforts to protect the fish shows that the listing is not necessary.

Coastal Cutthroat Trout

The proposal to list Southwest Washington/Columbia River Coastal Cutthroat Trout as threatened is still valid. Agency officials, however, believe that there is enough scientific uncertainty about this species of cutthroat trout that they have decided to extend the public comment period and decision process.

Cutthroat trout are very complex creatures. They spawn more than once, have interbred with other species, and even those with similar genetics have three different life cycles. They include resident trout, fluvial trout that migrate in a river system, and anadromous trout that spend part of their lives in the ocean and part in fresh water. It is for these reasons that the decision process to list has been extended.

This species of trout can be found in the Columbia River and its tributaries downstream from the Klickitat River in Washington and Fifteenmile Creek in Oregon (inclusive) and the Willamette River and its tributaries downstream from Willamette Falls. This includes Clackamas, Clatsop, Columbia, Hood River, Marion, Multnomah, Wasco, and Washington Counties in Oregon; and Clark, Cowlitz, Grays Harbor, Jefferson, Klickitat, Lewis, Mason, Pacific, Skamania, Thurston, Wahkiakum, and Yakima Counties in Washington.

For more information, go to <http://endangered.fws.gov/frpubs/n000414b.pdf> (you will need Adobe Acrobat Reader to view this file). For an abridged text version, go to <http://endangered.fws.gov/frpubs/s000414b.htm>

Westslope Cutthroat Trout

The USFWS' decision to not list the westslope cutthroat trout as threatened rejects a petition filed under the Endangered Species Act in 1997 by environmental groups that included American Wildlands, Trout Unlimited, the Idaho Watersheds Project and the Montana Environmental Information Center.

This particular species of cutthroat trout not only is within its historic range; it also inhabits at least 20 lakes in Montana's Glacier National Park, and six lakes in Idaho and Washington. It is for these primary reasons that the USFWS decided that the fish should not be listed as threatened.

Another consideration that affected the ruling is that the fish has been protected anyway because most of its habitat lies on lands administered by federal agencies, and many of the strongholds for the westslope cutthroat occur within roadless or wilderness areas or national parks.

The westslope cutthroat trout is bright yellow, orange and red, with the characteristic red slash of a cutthroat on its lower jaw. It is distinguishable from other subspecies of cutthroat trout by a pattern of black spots on its body.

The westslope cutthroat trout's historic range is the most widespread among the 14 subspecies of inland cutthroat trout. According to the USFWS, stocks of the fish remain in Montana, Wyoming, Idaho, Washington, Oregon and Canada.

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Parametrix project managers are encouraged to share this information with clients who may be interested in, or affected by, ESA listings and issues. Additional questions should be addressed to Megan Callahan Grant (mcallahan@parametrix.com), ESA Program Policy Analyst, who can direct them to the appropriate ESA Program staff member.