



Endangered Species Act Alert 2002-1

RE: Bull Trout Critical Habitat Designation
DATE: January 18, 2002

Over the next three years, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) will designate critical habitat for five populations of bull trout that are listed as “threatened” under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). This action is part of a settlement with environmental groups who sued USFWS for failing to designate critical habitat for bull trout earlier.

Critical habitat for threatened or endangered species includes areas that have the physical and biological features necessary for the survival of the species, and areas that may require special management considerations or protection. The designation of critical habitat has no regulatory impact on private property owners’ actions on their own land, unless a federal agency is involved (through funding or a federal permit).

While bull trout critical habitat will not be exactly the same as critical habitat that has already been designated for salmon populations, a great deal of overlap is anticipated. For more information on critical habitat for Northwest salmon populations, please see Alert 2000-3 (“NMFS’ Critical Habitat Designation”, March 2, 2000) at http://www.parametrix.com/esa/alerts/alert_003.pdf.

USFWS will begin the critical habitat designation process by collecting information on the types of habitat most important to bull trout. As part of this process, the agency will seek the “best available science” from other agencies, tribes, and non-governmental sources. In addition, the public is invited to submit scientific, as well as economic, information. In designating critical habitat, USFWS is permitted under the ESA to consider the potential economic costs and benefits of its decision. These factors *cannot* be considered by the agency in determining whether to list the species as threatened or endangered.

USFWS plans to propose critical habitat for the Columbia River Basin and Klamath Basin bull trout populations by October 2002, and make a final designation by October 2003. For the Puget Sound/Coastal, Jarbridge River (Nevada) and St. Mary’s/Belly River (Montana) populations, the proposal will be made by September 2003, and the final designation by September 2004.

Need More Information?

If you have questions or comments about this ESA Alert, please contact Megan Callahan Grant (mcallahan@parametrix.com), ESA Program Policy Analyst, who can direct them to the appropriate specialist.