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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Aug. 22, 2011

Fisheries agency releases plan to help upper Willamette Chinook and steelhead salmon

NOAA's Fisheries Service today released its recovery plan for upper Willamette Chinook and steelhead. The plan, prepared jointly with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, calls for improving habitat and hatcheries and reintroducing Chinook and steelhead into habitat above dams in the North and South Santiam, McKenzie and Middle Fork Willamette rivers.

Upper Willamette Chinook and steelhead have been listed as "threatened" under the Endangered Species Act since 1999. Dams have blocked salmon from reaching spawning habitat, and agricultural development and urbanization have degraded other habitat in the river. Releases of hatchery fish and both intentional and unintentional catch of salmon have also contributed to the decline of the populations, and have likely reduced their resiliency to natural threats, such as drought, poor ocean conditions and predation.

"Diverse local groups, all of which have a passionate interest in seeing these salmon and steelhead once again thrive, have produced a recovery plan that's scientifically sound and highly workable," said Will Stelle, head of NOAA's northwest regional fisheries service office. "This plan is the central organizing tool for taking action to benefit the fish in the Upper Willamette Basin, and we're ready to get to work with our partners."

The plan, a roadmap for public and private entities and individuals, outlines how to restore natural production of spring Chinook and winter steelhead in the Willamette River and its subbasin. The goal of the plan is to rebuild naturally self-sustaining populations that will no longer need federal protection under the Endangered Species Act. NOAA estimates the recovery of upper Willamette Chinook and steelhead salmon will take 25 years at the minimum, with a cost of at least \$265 million, if the plan's actions are all implemented.

Adopted early this month by the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission, the plan will also serve as a state conservation plan under Oregon's Native Fish Conservation Policy. With the publishing of the plan in the *Federal Register* today, it also serves as the official federal recovery plan, required for all species listed under the Endangered Species Act.

The plan and related documents are available on the Fisheries Northwest Region website at <http://go.usa.gov/kY2>, and at http://www.dfw.state.or.us/fish/CRP/upper_willamette_river_plan.asp.

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