

NW Fisheries Science Center
2725 Montlake Blvd. E.
Seattle, WA 98112

Dear Interested Party:

Enclosed please find the first of several draft documents developed by NOAA Fisheries' Northwest Fisheries Science Center for NOAA Fisheries Regional Office in support of the FCRPS Biological Opinion Remand effort. We hope that you can help us achieve appropriate distribution and review of this and subsequent documents as a first step in better coordinating the NWFSC's analyses with the important habitat work being conducted at the local and subbasin levels.

The NWFSC's effort is intended primarily to address the question: What is the likelihood that population or ESU status can be favorably affected by improvements to estuarine and tributary habitats? We are taking a three-step approach to answering this question: 1) estimate status of habitat processes historically and currently; 2) evaluate current and historic fish population status; and 3) characterize populations with respect to their habitat and fish status.

We use GIS-based analyses to infer current and historic (pre-European contact) conditions with respect to habitat-forming processes in the tributaries. (Current focal areas include: sediment, riparian condition, floodplain interactions, flow, diversion impingement and barriers to passage in tributary habitats.) Estuarine habitat characterization will be aimed at flow, salinity, temperature, bathymetry, habitat loss and predation, and will be derived from recent work conducted at the NWFSC. We include draft descriptions of our tributary work on riparian condition and sediment with this letter, and anticipate that the remainder will be distributed in the relatively near future.

Second, we characterize salmon and steelhead population status both currently and historically with respect to each of the four parameters identified in the Viable Salmonid Population document (McElhany et al. 2000): abundance, productivity, spatial structure and diversity. For current abundance and productivity metrics, we rely heavily on data collected for the 2002 Biological Review Team (BRT) review of listed salmon and steelhead on the Pacific coast (in draft at <<http://www.nwfsc.noaa.gov/trt/brtrpt.htm>>). Current spatial structure and diversity metrics are dependent on current distribution of spawners and juveniles, which we derived from Streamnet or updated state agency-documented distributions. Obviously, historic distribution, abundance and productivity are not well described. Therefore, integral to describing historic population status is an assessment of intrinsic potential or suitability of given stream reaches for salmon or steelhead spawning and rearing. We include a description of this intrinsic potential analysis with this letter, and intend to provide details about our fish population status evaluation in the near future.

When these analyses are completed, we will categorize populations with respect to habitat process impairment and fish population status. We are also likely to identify areas (6th field HUCs) within populations that may play a particularly important role in improving population status with respect to a particular VSP parameter (such as spatial structure). This work can be conducted once habitat and population status characterizations are complete.

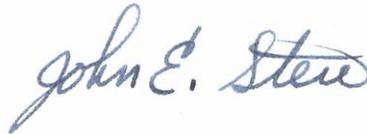
We are distributing draft components of the analysis for review sequentially, as completed, rather than a single final product. We hope that this early distribution will foster productive review and discussion, enhance opportunities for these analyses to be useful to local assessment efforts, and ultimately improve the quality of our effort. In this spirit, comments aimed at the logic of our approach and substantive problems with our results and conclusions will be particularly useful. Because each transmittal includes only a subset of our analyses, we are also including the planned outline of the final report to provide context for your review.

We are under a deadline, and while we recognize that this timeframe is short, we would appreciate receiving any comments you or others in your area may have by February 11, 2004 on these documents. Please send comments to Michelle McClure, electronically at michelle.mcclure@noaa.gov, or at the mailing address above.

Thank you very much,



Michelle McClure



John Stein