



Wild Fish Conservancy

N O R T H W E S T

S C I E N C E E D U C A T I O N A D V O C A C Y

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WFC COMMENTS ON TOKUL CREEK SEPA DNS JAN 2013

Wild Fish Conservancy appreciates the opportunity to provide comments to the Department's Determination of Nonsignificance (DNS) of proposed work at the Tokul Creek Hatchery in King County. The project proposes to: 1) construct a replacement fishway; 2) remodel and screen the surface water intake and; 3) replace the water diversion dam, a mechanical building, and a retaining wall.

In summary, we believe that the DNS is not supported and that the sequencing of this project in relation to other plans is illogical. A full Environmental Impact Statement should be conducted if the Department insists on going forward with the project. Detailed comments follow.

According to the Department's web site on "hatchery reform" (https://fortress.wa.gov/dfw/score/score/hatcheries/hatcheries_reform.jsp), the Department worked with federal agencies and the Hatchery Scientific Review Group (HSRG) "to identify ways to minimize adverse impacts of hatchery operations on depressed wild stocks, while contributing to sustainable fisheries." The Fish and Wildlife Commission also adopted a policy aimed at minimizing the impact of hatcheries on wild fish. The web page goes on to say that

Implementation of these above initiatives relative to WDFW hatchery programs will occur through the development of Hatchery Action Implementation Plans (HAIP) and then be documented in Hatchery and Genetic Management Plans submitted for federal ESA coverage.

Hatchery Action Implementation Plans align salmon and steelhead production by population with watershed level priorities. This ensures the hatchery production is consistent with conservation goals and/or harvest management objectives.

To the best of our knowledge, there has not been a HAIP developed for either the Tokul Creek Hatchery or a larger document for the Snohomish basin. Information from the Department indicates that HGMPs for steelhead are some months away because the Puget Sound steelhead Technical Recovery Team has not completed its work regarding viability analyses for the various

steelhead populations (in any event, it appears that a HAIP is needed before HGMPs are prepared).

In 2008, the Department considered closing the Tokul Creek Hatchery and was met with some vocal opposition from recreational fishers. According to news reports at that time, many of the opponents called for the Department to provide the “science” to justify the closure. It does not appear that the Department ever responded, although there were numerous studies showing that hatchery plantings adversely affect wild fish and that results of subsequent studies confirm that. But now it seems as if the Department has reached the opposite conclusion in that a few vocal opponents of hatchery closure can drive hatchery policy and commit the Department to spend \$12 million *despite* the science.

We believe that much more information and public input is needed before deciding to commit funds to improve a hatchery that has not been fully evaluated. Fish passage for Chinook ascending Tokul Creek could be realized through a hatchery closure and removal of the existing diversion dam. That result might occur if an objective examination of the Tokul Creek Hatchery and an alternatives analysis were done. Instead, the Department proposes to commit approximately \$12 million in public funds to rebuild much of the facility and preclude any possibility of its closure. Production of hatchery winter steelhead and non-native trout will be assured for several decades into the future. Unfortunately, the production and release into the Snoqualmie River of the highly domesticated Chambers Creek winter steelhead stock poses non-trivial risks to ESA-listed Puget Sound winter-run steelhead of which wild Snoqualmie, Skykomish, and Snohomish basin winter-steelhead are a part.

For approximately thirty years, wild winter-run steelhead escapement has steadily decreased, while release of hatchery steelhead has increased (Figures 1 and 2). In addition, sports catches of Tokul Hatchery steelhead have showed little coherent relation to smolt releases. We realize that causation is not demonstrated through positive correlations alone, but in this case, where extensive scientific literature from throughout the Northwest indicates negative impacts on wild fish from hatchery production, we believe that these data should cause the Department to pause in its plans to rebuild the Tokul Creek facility. (See for example the Letter from NMFS Science Center staff to the Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe regarding the tribe’s proposed continuation of the Chambers Creek hatchery steelhead program in the Elwha River following dam removal, [attached](#)). If the Department has data that show how the Tokul Creek facility affects wild ESA-listed Snoqualmie steelhead (or Chinook), we would appreciate an opportunity to examine them.

The current Hatchery Genetic Management Plan for the hatchery’s winter-run steelhead program, submitted to NMFS in March 2003 is both outdated and unapproved by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). NMFS listed Puget Sound Steelhead as Threatened under the ESA in May 2007. The lack of NMFS approval means that the hatchery has been in violation of Section 4(d) of the ESA, and that continued releases of Chambers Creek stock from the hatchery are resulting in illegal take of Puget Sound steelhead. Further, numerous relevant scientific studies pertaining to the harm to wild steelhead from interactions with hatchery steelhead have been published since HGMP was submitted; consequently, the HGMP does not reflect the best available science that is relevant to the HGMP. According to the Department, updated HGMPs on the various steelhead programs are many months away. Without an updated and approved

HGMP (and the HAIP on which it should be based), it seems premature to prepare for construction in summer and fall of 2013 at the Tokul Creek facility.

In addition to biological harms to wild fish likely to be perpetuated, if not exacerbated, by the project, the project will require additional construction and maintenance of roads and highways associated with and adjacent to the hatchery facility by Washington State Department of Transportation (WDOT). WDOT estimates that roadwork associated with the left bank failure that is exacerbated by the hatchery footprint in the floodplain will cost in the neighborhood of \$40 million, more than three times the cost of the project. An alternative of closure of the hatchery and removal of hatchery structures from the floodplain of Tokul Creek would likely reduce in the near term, and ultimately eliminate, road maintenance required from perpetual bank erosion caused and/or exacerbated by the presence of hatchery structures and infrastructure. The SEPA checklist and the DNS do not address these issues. Discussion of this issue and alternative cannot properly and adequately occur outside of an EIS.

These several issues alone call into question the decision to commit substantial public funds to the project, especially while the state faces significant shortfalls funding education, health care, and other public obligations that are arguably more important than providing recreational fishing opportunities. The operational life of the hatchery will be extended several decades into the future before an updated evaluation of the steelhead program will occur. We believe that the environmental impacts outweigh the benefits. Only a full EIS and alternatives analysis can address such controversy. Perhaps the Department will eventually conclude that the Tokul Creek Hatchery should be upgraded to provide angling opportunities despite the ecological harm, but at least after an EIS and alternative analysis, that decision will have been an open and public one that considers the true costs and benefits of the project.

We also note the following points of concern regarding the technical designs themselves which the DNS does not satisfactorily address:

- With the orientation of the upstream end of the fish ladder, is it assumed all outmigrants (kelts and juveniles) go over the dam or is it assumed that they will use the fish ladder? What is the basis for the assumptions made? Have those impacts been assessed?
- If the dam pool is deep enough to receive outmigrants, is it also deep enough to encourage adults to try to leap the dam instead of using the ladder (false attraction)? Has this possibility been considered or evaluated?
- What is to keep hatchery chinook / steelhead from ascending the fish ladder? If they will be able to ascend the ladder at will, have the implications for PHOS been evaluated?
- Will upstream passage of natural-origin steelhead and Chinook be impeded at the ladder until the Hatchery's brood quota is attained? If so, have the impacts to wild steelhead been evaluated? Per WDFW Draft Fishway Guidelines for Washington State (2000), are the following conditions met?
 - Fishways must be designed for the smallest fish of the species requiring passage.
 - Passage should be provided for 90% of the migration period for the target species, and passage shall not be violated more than 100-hours during the migration season and for no longer than 24-hours at a time.

- Avoid distractions such as spilling water or jets of water that effectively lead fish away from fishway entrances.
- Avoid exit location next to the spillway or powerhouse intakes. Locate the exit on a bank-line that will guide fish upstream rather than in the center of the channel. Extend the exit channel upstream if necessary to locate the exit in an area of consistent positive downstream flow.
- Was a roughened channel considered as an alternative to rebuilding the diversion dam? Have the hydrologic impacts of climate change been considered and have these considerations informed consideration of alternative water sources and technologies such as recirculation? What alternatives were assessed before coming to rest on the approach to rebuild the dam?

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide comments. If you have questions or require additional information, I can be reached at kurt@wildfishconservancy.org, or by phone at 425-788-1167.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kurt Beardslee". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Kurt Beardslee, Executive Director
Wild Fish Conservancy

ATTACHMENTS

Letter of April 14, 2010 from George Pess, Jim, Myers, and Jeff Hard to Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe, re: Chambers Creek hatchery winter steelhead in the Elwha River

FIGURES

Figure 1- Wild Winter Steelhead Escapement vs. Time

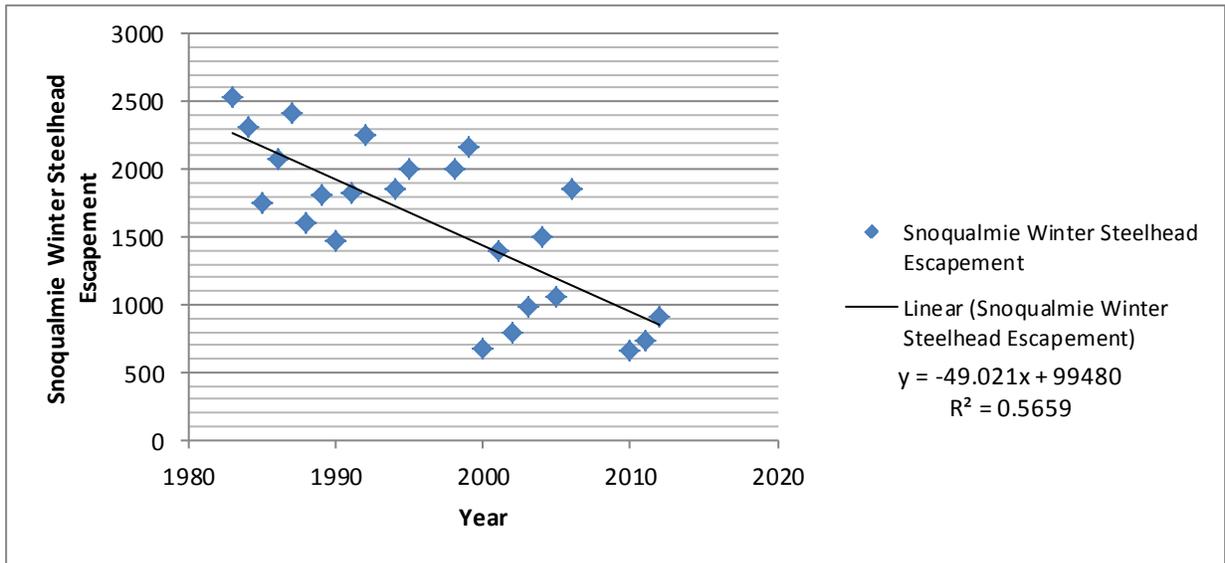


Figure 2- Hatchery Steelhead Smolt Plantings vs. Time

