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News Release



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Critical Habitat Proposed for Washington's Coastal-Puget Sound Population of Bull Trout

Proposal will publish in the June 25 edition of the Federal Register

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The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is proposing critical habitat for the Coastal-Puget Sound population of bull trout, which was listed as a threatened species in 1999.

Bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*), is a threatened species protected under the Federal Endangered Species Act. The Service's action is in response to a lawsuit filed by the Alliance for the Wild Rockies and Friends of the Wild Swan.

The Coastal-Puget Sound population is located west of the Cascade mountains in the state of Washington. It includes bull trout in the Puget Sound Management Unit and the Olympic Peninsula Management Unit. The Puget Sound Management Unit includes all watersheds within the Puget Sound basin and the marine near-shore areas of Puget Sound. The Olympic Peninsula Management Unit includes all watersheds within the Olympic Peninsula and the near-shore marine waters of the Pacific Ocean, Strait of Juan de Fuca and Hood Canal.

The critical habitat proposal calls for a total of 2,290 miles of streams in western Washington to be designated as bull trout critical habitat, along with 52,540 acres of lakes and reservoirs and marine habitat paralleling 985 miles of shoreline. Details of the critical habitat proposal will be included in the

proposed at that time to designate 396 miles of streams and 33,939 acres of lakes and marshes in Oregon as critical habitat for the Klamath River Basin population of bull trout. Those proposals are expected to be finalized in September 2004.

Bull trout have declined due to habitat degradation and fragmentation, blockage of migratory corridors, poor water quality, past fisheries management, and the introduction of non-native species such as brown, lake, and brook trout. While bull trout occur over a large area, many of the populations are small and isolated from each other, making them more susceptible to local extinctions.

Bull trout are members of the char subgroup of the salmon family. They require very cold, clean water to thrive and are excellent indicators of water quality and stream health. Char have light-colored spots on a darker background – the reverse of the dark-spots-on-light-background pattern of trout and salmon. Bull trout have a large, flattened head and pale-yellow to crimson body spots on an olive green to brown background. They lack teeth in the roof of the mouth.

Some bull trout populations are migratory, spending portions of their life cycle in larger rivers, lakes or marine environments before returning to smaller streams to spawn, while others complete their entire life cycle in the same stream. They can grow to more than 20 pounds in lake environments and live up to 12 years. Under exceptional circumstances, they can live more than 20 years.

The critical habitat proposal for the Coastal-Puget Sound population of bull trout, and for the Jarbidge River and St. Mary-Belly River populations, will be published in the *Federal Register* on June 25, 2004 initiating a 60-day comment period that ends on August 25, 2004. Comments may be sent to John Young, Bull Trout Coordinator, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 911 N.E. 11th Avenue, Portland, OR 97232. Comments may also be submitted on the Pacific Region's Bull Trout Web site at r1bulltroutch@r1.fws.gov or faxed to John Young at 503-231-6243.

Maps, fact sheets, photographs and other materials relating to today's announcement may be found on the Pacific Region's Bull Trout Web site at <http://species.fws.gov/bulltrout>. Television stations interested in video footage of bull trout may call the Service's Regional External Affairs Office at 503-231-6121.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 544 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resources offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign and Native American tribal governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.