The Endangered Species Act has come to the urban Northwest. In the past, protection has been granted primarily to backwoods critters, such as bald eagles or spotted owls. Creatures that - all things being equal - would prefer to avoid big city life. Now, new listings have been added: runs of steelhead, Chinook and chum salmon that pass through the middle of metro Portland and Seattle. Urban runs of cutthroat trout are being considered too. These listings should come as no surprise. In recent years, it has become clear that urban areas do more damage to fish, per unit of area, than any clearcut, or any single industrial polluter. Where Portland now sprawls, a rich labyrinth of wetlands, streams, sloughs, and riverine habitats once criss-crossed the landscape. The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife reports that roughly 388 miles of streams that formerly flowed through the Portland area are now dead, uninhabitable to fish, due to a host of human impacts. In those urban streams that still house fish, it is not uncommon to find 90% of the fish population dying annually due to human disturbances, before they make it to the sea. The processes by which we have converted the Pacific Northwest's productive fish streams into biological sterile urban ditches have been unending and ubiquitous: filling, culverts, paving, pollution. And this destruction of fish habitat continues today. Maybe even in a neighborhood near you.

Streams and wetlands have been drained, channeled into culverts that do not allow fish passage, and covered with fill, so that homes and businesses and streets could be built above. It has always been more profitable for developers to build over, rather than around, fish-bearing streams. Those streams that do remain in urbanized areas, straightened and channeled, have become less hospitable to fish, losing their riffles, their deep cool pools, the places where fish hide from predators. Paving, and the removal of streamside vegetation commonly increases summer water temperatures to a level where fish cannot survive. Unlike the forests and clearings that stood where cities now sprawl, rainfall runs off pavement very fast; streams that once roared year-round now become lukewarm, muddy trickles during the dry season. Meandering, multiple-branched streams and their lush, productive banks have been slowly converted into a geometric pattern of underground pipes and urban ditches.

And then there is the pollution. In the Puget Sound basin, a recent U.S. Geological Survey study of suburban streams found a tidy correlation between peak levels of toxins in fish-bearing streams and peak sales periods at home and garden stores. They found 23 different toxins in most of these waterways. All of these toxins had washed off of well-groomed suburban yards into fish-bearing streams, all of them combining into a toxic, fish-killing soup. Moss killer, weed killer, insect killer, fungus killer, this-killer, that-killer. All of them over-the-counter killers. Weed-and-seed; diazanon, mecoprop, 2,4-D; things that good, everyday people put on their lawns and driveways to fight back the weeds and bugs, to bring domesticated order out of nature's chaos; things that, in large concentrations, kill fish and birds. Things that, in lower doses, can damage the liver or cause birth defects. On many of these products, in big, cheerful letters, you will find the words: "Toxic to Fish." And the manufacturers aren't kidding. It is not a particularly big deal when one person dumps these substances onto their yard; it is a very big deal indeed when half the suburbanites in a city the size of metro Portland or Seattle dump them on their yard. It is what some call 'non-point source pollution' - it is not coming from a single industrial polluter. It is the most democratic form of pollution. It is coming from all of us.

Yet, here and there, fish have been able to hold on. Wild fish persist in the most improbable places, such as in the trenches that line old, suburban front yards. Or they persist in places such as east Portland's Johnson Creek, where native steelhead and coho fingerlings are still found, a tiny remnant of the runs of Chinook, coho, and steelhead that filled this Creek a few generations ago. With the new Endangered Species Act listing, there is some hope for the restoration of these remnant runs. There is hope: that these few fish might be allowed to thrive, to lay their eggs, and increasingly, generation after generation, have their offspring survive into adulthood. But with this hope comes a threat - that there will be a tremendous surge in the regulation of all activities that negatively impact fish. And that means almost anything we do in cities. Fish aren't all that picky - all they ask is for clear cold water, places to hide, things to eat. But it is a challenge for city dwellers to change their behavior, and to change the landscape, to meet the needs of fish. No matter how many eggs these fish lay, their offspring will not survive without a dramatic improvement in the quality of their habitat. Portland and other urban areas now attempt to bring about a 70% to 80% reduction in urban stream pollution through public education, alone: don't dump toxic liquids down storm drains. Don't douse your yard in pesticides and herbicides. Basic stuff. Cities now also seek to reconstruct damaged and drained wetland areas along urban streams, each wetland serving to house fish and the bugs they eat, to trap and settle out toxins, to slow the rate of stream flow and reduce stream temperatures. Many cities now ask developers to leave streamside buffers of natural vegetation. Despite the diverse side-benefits of buffers - habitat for birds and other wildlife, or aesthetic and recreational values - many developers still fight these policies tooth-and-nail, lest it reduce their total buildable acreage and cut into their profits. It is an uphill battle, as Northwestern urban areas sprawl, each new subdivision browning the waters with sediments during construction, each new subdivision increasing the amount of pollution, the rate of runoff, the temperature of the water, soon thereafter.

All of this raises an important question: ultimately, can humans and salmon live together?

For those of us who live on the coast, this is not an abstract, theoretical question. It is a question that will affect how we live and what we do in our own backyards. Coastal coho salmon also appear on the Endangered Species list. Coastal cutthroat may be listed as well. Ecola Creek, and its hundreds of tiny tributaries contain a small, remnant population of these fish. While their numbers were once quite high, they have plummeted in recent years. During the most recent Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife survey, not a single adult, breeding coho salmon was found in Ecola Creek. A few younger fish are present; the population is not yet extinguished. But, for a stream that contained a small, viable breeding population in the early 1990s, this is a staggering decline. The causes are diverse, but those of us who live in Cannon Beach cannot simply direct the blame eastward, toward the 'managed forests' behind town, or westward, toward the fish harvests and capricious natural cycles of the sea. For coho salmon, the small streams and wetlands that enter Ecola Creek near its mouth are the most important places for feeding and breeding. And downtown Cannon Beach was built over some of the most rich, productive wetland areas in the entire Ecola Creek basin; they were filled, diked, and paved. A significant portion of the wetlands used by coho salmon were turned into parking lots and building lots. Meandering channels were forced into a rigid underground geometry of pipes and culverts. This is a recent development; many locals recall how the town's building were constructed atop short pilings, and how the water would rise under the boardwalks along Hemlock Street when the tides were high. For all practical purposes, this habitat is gone. Only a radical reconfiguration of the City's structure would bring it back.

However, there are a number of other areas in town where wetland salmon habitat persists, but where it is being immediately and directly impacted by human activities. Perhaps the most pressing local case is on the north end of Cannon Beach, in the Logan Creek basin. This basin includes a network of streams that drain the slopes below Ecola State Park, and converge into Logan Creek, which flows into the northern shore of Ecola Creek. Here, vast wetland areas have been gradually reduced, due to home and road construction. As the last large area in Cannon Beach with a dense concentration of buildable lots, the Logan Creek basin may soon witness this town's final, major building boom. Fish persist in these creeks, coho and cutthroat swimming between homes and along roadways. Still, they are present in much reduced numbers than a few years before. Simultaneously, the City of Cannon Beach contemplates the future of Logan Creek and its tributaries, responding to occasional complaints, legitimate complaints, about sporadic shallow floods in the lower reaches of Logan Creek. Traditionally, to control these floods, a municipal government would have simply sought the most efficient way to move water down the hill, from Point A to Point B. Traditionally, a City might drain the wetlands and place streams in culverts, 'piping' the water across the landscape like leaky bathroom plumbing. This solution would temporarily reduce flooding, but forever damage the health of endemic fish populations. Today, however, things have changed.

The Logan Creek basin has been radically transformed in the last century. Putting aside for a moment the fact that the neighborhood that experiences these occasional floods was built smack-dab in the middle of a wetland (where maybe - just maybe - one might expect a little flooding) we might still say that the flooding that now plagues the area has been intensified by human activities. The landscape has been repeatedly devegetated, its old forests clearcut, the scrubby second-growth forest removed to make way for houses. Increasingly it has been built upon, with clearing, fill and other changes that have dramatically altered local hydrology. Building has served to 'harden' surfaces, making them impermeable; when rain falls, it now rolls directly off the pavement, gravel, and rooftops. The forest vegetation pushed back, lot by lot. Cumulatively, these changes cause rain to run off much faster after storms, and this has complicated flooding during times of peak rainfall. But also, this process has reduced the minimum or 'base flow' of the Logan Creek system during dry months, as much of the water is immediately "flushed" through the system; this leaves little water remaining in the basin to gradually recharge the streams once the rain ceases. As in any place where the land is developed, peak flows are becoming higher, low flows are becoming lower. And while high peak flows (i.e., floods) may be an annoyance to humans, low base flows are a tremendous annoyance to fish. Over time, reduced base flows reduce fish mobility and fish habitat - like urban streams, the tributaries of Logan Creek might easily become trickling 'ditches' of lukewarm water. Traditional flood control, with its pipes and culverts, would do nothing to improve these base flows, and would often impede the movement of fish. The fish, traditionally, have not been impressed.

There may yet be solutions that allow us to address the flooding issue, allow home construction, and preserve - or even enhance - existing fish and wildlife habitat on the Logan Creek basin. With local fish populations plummeting, it would be a shame not to. Such an approach might involve preserving and enhancing existing wetland areas. With very slight changes, these wetlands might be enhanced to provide better habitat, and more effectively slow the flow of water out of the basin -thereby reducing floods while increasing the Creek's base flow. This 'low-tech' solution might prove both effective and inexpensive, in contrast with a more traditional approach that would improve drainage at the cost of fish habitat. It would kill two birds - the flooding issue and the habitat issue - with the same low-tech stone. Any proposal that advocates more culverts and more drainage ditches would arguably represent a big step in the wrong direction. If a fish-friendly solution is to be approved, however, it is tremendously important that the citizens of Cannon Beach actively participate in the planning process. In the months ahead, look for references to Logan Creek and the basin's "SHED" project [Salmon Habitat Ecology Drainage] in the local papers. Let the City know how you feel about the future of fish in our town. Show up when the City asks for public comment on their plans for the Logan Creek basin. Do not hesitate to share your ideas and opinions on the issue. Right now, right here, in our own backyard, we could do a lot of harm or we could do a lot of good. Let the City hear your voice. We have nothing to lose but our habitat. We have nothing to lose but our last wild salmon.

Pacific Greens
by Margi Shindler

Q: What do you get when put three progressives in a convention hall?
A: Two parties and a faction.

At least that has traditionally been the case. But on Saturday, May 15th, the Pacific Greens and the Socialist Party of Oregon reversed that unfortunate historical trend by merging to form the largest progressive political party in the Northwest. The Pacific Greens bring to the table statewide ballot status, a record of robust grassroots activism, and the rising tide of the international Green Party movement. The Socialists offer tremendous organizing skills, a sitting Salem City Councilman, and their historic leadership in the struggle for social and economic justice. Together they have created a well-rounded, dynamic, and energized political force, a new home for the increasing numbers of Oregon voters disgusted with both the Democrats and Republicans. The Pacific Greens provide an alternative party dedicated to wrestling political power away special monied interests and returning it to the people. Saturday's convention also approved by consensus a working draft of a Pacific Green platform. When merger talks began, there was some concern that the more libertarian Greens and the Socialists would differ on the role of government. But as they cut through the rhetoric and their preconceived notions of each other to develop a concrete political program, they found they shared a common vision of progressive government. Some key points in the platform draft adopted at the convention:

* Decentralize political and economic power.
* Free the political process from the dominance of big money and the two decrepit parties that monied interests have bought and paid for.
* Protect and restore the environment.
* Build an ecologically sustainable and socially just economy.
* Provide for every citizen's basic human needs such as food, shelter, and health care.
* Protect everyone's human and civil rights.
* Keep government - and corporations - out of people's private lives.

The Pacific Greens are now ready to move foreward and become a powerful force in Oregon politics.

If you have any questions, please contact:
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The day when nobody comes back from a war it will be because the war has at last been properly organized. Boris Vain

Mitigation Act: Unilateral Legislative Theft of 1868
Fort Laramie Treaty Land

The so-called "Mitigation Act," passed in October 1998 as Title VI of the 1999 Omnibus Appropriations Act, is known by the long title of "Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe, Lower Brule Sioux Tribe, and state of South Dakota Terrestrial Wildlife Restoration Act." The Act would transfer between 100,000 - 200,000 acres of land along the Missouri River to the state of South Dakota, land to which tribes signatory to the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty retain unextinguished title. The Act was passed as a rider to the 14,000 page Omnibus Appropriations Act. It is clear that most members of congress did not understand what was involved in Title VI, as the five tribes opposed to the act were not given the opportunity to voice their concerns through a congressional hearing. The five tribes, (Yankton Sioux Tribe, Oglala Sioux Tribe, Rosebud Sioux Tribe, Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, and Crow Creek Sioux Tribe) and the Black Hills Sioux Nation Treaty Council are calling for congressional oversight hearings to repeal the Act and for a comprehensive EIS (Environmental Impact Statement) before any move is made to transfer the land to South Dakota.

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UPPER LEFT EDGE JUNE 1999