

# New recovery plan aims for delisting Oregon coho

NOAA Fisheries have released a recovery plan for Oregon Coast coho salmon that calls for public-private partnerships to conserve habitat for the threatened species, positioning coho for possible removal from the federal list of threatened and endangered species within the next 10 years.

If the plan is successful, Oregon Coast coho could become the first of 28 threatened and endangered species of salmon and steelhead on the West Coast to recover to the point they can be delisted from the Endangered Species Act.

"We can see that recovery is in reach for Oregon Coast coho, which is a testament to

the hard work by the state, coastal communities and landowners to restore habitat and reduce threats from hatcheries and harvest," said Barry Thom, Regional Administrator of NOAA Fisheries' West Coast Region. "Strong partnerships have brought us this far, and they will be critical to get the rest of the way to delisting."

As many as one to two million coho once returned to rivers and streams on the Oregon Coast, supporting fisheries that helped anchor local economies. Intensive fishing and heavy logging through the 1900s contributed to declines, and the number of spawning adults dropped below 15,000 in

the 1980s.

NOAA Fisheries initially listed Oregon Coast coho as a threatened species in 1998.

The condition of the species has since improved as state fish and wildlife officials reduced the risks posed by harvest and hatcheries. Partnerships bridging state, local, tribal and federal levels have helped implement projects to reopen and improve habitat.

Recent numbers have ranged from more than 350,000 spawning adults in 2011 and 2014, dropping back to 57,000 in 2015.

The threats still affecting coho include degraded habitat, especially the loss of floodplain

habitat where many juvenile coho spend their first year growing before migrating to the ocean.

A lack of large wood in rivers that provides rearing habitat for young fish is also a factor. Reduced water quality and barriers such as culverts that block migrating fish pose continuing threats.

"The best available science tells us that habitat is the bottom line in stabilizing and rebuilding coho to the point they can sustain themselves," said Rob Walton, recovery coordinator for NOAA Fisheries' West Coast Region in western Oregon. Coho remain vulnerable to the effects of cli-

mate change on the rivers and streams where they spawn and rear, but improved habitat can help mitigate those impacts.

The plan is voluntary, not regulatory, and hinges on local support and collaboration. Coho recovery, and ultimately delisting, will depend in large part on voluntary actions by partners implementing the recovery plan, complemented by regulatory protections under the Endangered Species Act and other state and local directives.

The plan promotes a network of partnerships that integrate the needs of Oregon Coast coho with the needs of coastal communities.

"The plan recognizes the critical role of local landowners and communities in bringing about recovery," said Guido Rahr, president and CEO of the Wild Salmon Center in Portland, which is leading development of a business plan to guide local recovery measures. "We all must be part of a solution that will deliver multiple benefits for Oregon in the form of resilient communities, improved habitat and healthy fish populations."

For more details and to view the recovery plan, visit NOAA Fisheries West Coast Region website at [www.go.usa.gov/x8w53](http://www.go.usa.gov/x8w53).

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**ATHLETE  
OF THE  
WEEK**



**Nick Steinman**

**Siuslaw H.S.  
Wrestling**

The senior 170-pounder won two of three matches last week in Elmira, pinning John Rasmussen of Forest Grove in 1:30; then doing the same to Elmira's Mikey Montgomery in 1:05.

**Honorable Mention  
Jesus Sierra**

Honorable mention goes to Jesus Sierra who also won two matches by fall in Elmira, pinning Sweet Home's Noah Moore in 3:29 and Elmira's Logan Shoemaker in 1:49.

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## Show your support of whales with new license plate

CORVALLIS — A new license plate featuring a gray whale and her calf likely will be available to Oregon drivers by summer 2017.

This project is sponsored by the Oregon State University Marine Mammal Institute and enthusiasm for it is running high, said Bruce Mate, director of the institute. Thousands of flyers will be passed out on the Oregon coast in the coming week to help residents learn more about what they can do to support the initiative.

"Everybody I've shown the plate design to has loved it," said Mate, whose institute will receive \$35 from the Oregon Department of Transportation every time a vehicle owner spends \$40 to buy the plate.

The money will go toward whale research, graduate student education and public out-

reach.

The license plate depicts the cow-calf pair on a two-tone blue background that emulates sea and sky. In the upper left corner is a lighthouse, and across the bottom it reads "Coastal Playground."

Renowned wildlife illustrator Pieter Folkens created the lifelike whale images, originally for a poster for the Marine Mammal Institute, which is part of OSU's College of Agricultural Sciences.

"They're extremely detailed," Mate said. "You can see every barnacle."

The institute paid an application fee of \$5,000 to ODOT to begin the license plate process, Mate said, and will pay another \$80,000 to cover production costs. In addition, it needs to turn in an "expression of interest" from at least 3,000 vehicle

owners stating they plan to buy the plate.

To help with that, 30,000 flyers will be distributed along the coast by Oregon State Parks and Recreation Department volunteers helping out during the annual weeklong "Whale Watching Spoken Here" celebration that runs between Christmas and New Year's. Each flyer contains an expression-of-interest form.

There will be volunteers at all Oregon coastal headlands to help visitors see southward-migrating gray whales.

Between 10,000 and 25,000 whale watchers interact with the volunteers each year during the week between Dec. 25 and Jan. 1, Mate said.

Interest can also be registered online at [www.mmi.oregonstate.edu/whaleplate](http://www.mmi.oregonstate.edu/whaleplate).

No financial commitment is

required, but it's asked that only those serious about buying a Coastal Playground plate register.

"It's a great plate and promotes coastal tourism and just a healthy image for Oregon," Mate said. "I expect a lot of people will like it, and it's a way for people to inexpensively support marine mammals."

It's not necessary to wait for a vehicle's registration to need renewal, or buy a new car, to purchase the Coastal Playground plate, Mate noted.

For \$40, a new plate can be ordered at any time without affecting the vehicle's registration cycle.

"This plate is a joyful celebration," Mate said. "Gray whales were on the Endangered Species List because of exploitation, and now they're the only whale species to have

been removed from the list because they've recovered.

"And they're Oregon's flagship large whale. Ninety-five percent of the whales you see from shore are gray whales."

Visible from the coastline year-round, gray whales migrate past Oregon in both directions on their annual journey between Alaska and Baja California.

From late April to mid June, northward-migrating females and their calves stay close to shore to avoid predation from killer whales — so close, Mate says, "you could practically skip a stone out to them."

During the first week in January, the peak time for the southern migration, gray whales pass by Oregon viewing points at an average rate of 35 whales per hour.

### Fishing

from 1B

Fish are throughout the bay and river. Eggs and bobber can be productive in the upper bay and river as the season progresses.

Steelhead fishing is open. Fish are entering the mainstem with the first entering steelhead near the town of Alsea. Casting spinners, drifting bait or using a bobber and jig can be effective.

**SALMON RIVER:** *Chinook*  
The Salmon River and bay is open for Chinook salmon. The run is near the end but a few fish are still entering the system.

Trolling herring in the lower bay is an effective technique. Eggs and bobber can be productive in the upper bay and river as the season progresses.

Sulphur Creek angling is restricted to single point hook metal lures, fly angling, or salmon bobber angling.

**SILETZ RIVER:** *Steelhead, Chinook*

The Siletz River and bay is open for Chinook salmon. Fishing is slow.

Fish are throughout the bay and river. Trolling herring in the lower bay is an effective technique. Eggs and bobber or drifting eggs can be productive in the upper bay and river as

the season progresses.

Consult the regulations for changes in deadline locations through the season.

Steelhead fishing is slow. Casting spinners, drifting bait or using a bobber and jig can be effective. For cutthroat trout, casting small spinners, spoons or fly fishing streamers or dry flies can be very effective.

**WILSON RIVER:** *Chinook*  
Fall Chinook fishing is fair on the Wilson River. The Wilson has fished well for fall Chinook this season, and although things will probably start to slow down toward the end of the month, there are still some good fish coming in.

Keep an eye on the weather and River conditions. All of the usual techniques, such as bobber fishing, divers and bait, and back bouncing should be effective.

The lower Wilson basin has some early returning hatchery fish and they should start trickling in towards the end of the month.

**YAQUINA RIVER:** *Chinook*  
The Yaquina River and bay is open for Chinook salmon. Fishing is slow. Trolling herring in the lower bay is an effective technique.

Eggs and bobber can be productive in the upper bay and

river as the season progresses.

**COOS COUNTY LAKES AND PONDS:** *Trout*

Rainbow trout were stocked in Upper Empire, Bradley, Saunders, Powers and Butterfield lakes last month.

Anglers have been catching lots of trout on Powerbait, flies, or by trolling spinners. This was the last stocking of these lakes until the spring.

Trout anglers are also catching trout in Eel and Tenmile lakes. Trolling wedding ring spinners tipped with a night-crawler has been really effective.

**UMPQUA RIVER, SOUTH:** The South Umpqua is now open.

**WINCHESTER BAY:** Bottomfish, perch

Fishing for bottom fish in the Triangle and South jetty has been successful.

**TENMILE BASIN:** *Trout, bass, yellow perch, coho*

Trout fishing in the streams of the Tenmile Basin are now closed until May 22.

Trout fishing in Tenmile Lakes is open all year.

There is no wild coho fishery in Tenmile Lakes this fall.

Largemouth bass fishing has been decent over the past couple weeks. Anglers are catching bass near structure or on the deep end of the weed lines using spinner baits, jigs, or rubber worms.

Fishing for yellow perch has picked up in Tenmile Lakes. Anglers have been catching a few yellow perch measuring

14 to 15-inches long.

Worms fished near the lake bottom work very well for catching yellow perch. Anglers should fish in water depths of 15 feet or deeper to consistently find the bigger yellow perch.

**PACIFIC OCEAN AND BEACHES:** *Bottomfish, surf perch, salmon*

Recreational ocean salmon fishing from Cape Falcon to Humbug Mt. is closed for salmon fishing, except the Elk River Chinook Terminal Season is closed.

Both the All Depth and the Nearshore Halibut seasons are now closed.

Fishing for bottom fish opened back up to all-depths.

Fishing for black rockfish has been good from Coos Bay south to Bandon. Fishing for ling cod has been decent.

The marine fish daily bag limit is seven fish and a separate daily limit for lingcod (2). Anglers can only keep 3 blue rockfish and 1 canary rockfish as part of their daily limit and there will be no harvest of China, quillback, or copper rockfish. Anglers may harvest 1 cabezon per day.

**BOTTOM FISHING:**

Fishing for bottomfish was limited last week due to weather conditions. For those few who did venture out, there was some success with lingcod and rockfish.

The recreational groundfish fishery is open at all depths through March.

ODFW encourages anglers to release all prohibited rockfish by using a descending device to safely return fish to a depth of 60 feet or more. Even fish that are severely bloated can survive after being released at depth.

For more information and videos, please see the rockfish recompression webpage.

There's a new rockfish in town: the Deacon rockfish. Deacon rockfish is a newly identified species that was formerly referred to as the solid version of blue rockfish. What does that mean for anglers?

Nothing in 2016.

Every rule that refers to blue rockfish (like the daily bag limit of 3 now applies to blue rockfish and deacon rockfish combined).

**PACIFIC HALIBUT:**

Recreational halibut fishing in all Oregon subareas are now closed for the remainder of 2016. This year, anglers were able to catch approximately 95 percent of the Oregon recreational quota of just over 220,000 pounds.

The 2017 quota will be determined in early January 2017.

**BAY CLAMS:**

Bay clamming is open along the entire Oregon Coast from the Columbia River to the California border. Check the ODFW Shellfish website for where and when to harvest your favorite bivalves. Updated maps on where to clam.

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