

**ESA Recovery Planning in the Washington Gorge:
Overview, Update, and Steps to Implementation**

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Abstract. Section 4(f) of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) requires NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to develop recovery plans for all listed marine and anadromous species. For the ESA, 'recovery' means that the species is again naturally self-sustaining over the long term, no longer needs the protection of the ESA, and can be 'delisted'. NMFS listed Middle Columbia River steelhead as threatened on March 25, 1999, and again on January 5, 2006.

The ESA requires that recovery plans contain: (1) site-specific management actions as may be necessary to achieve the plan's goal for the conservation and survival of the species; (2) objective, measurable criteria which, when met, would result in 'delisting' the species; and, (3) estimates of the time and costs to implement recovery actions.

NMFS' 2008 Proposed Recovery Plan for the Middle Columbia Steelhead Distinct Population Segment (DPS) released for public review and comment September 24, 2008 through December 23, 2008, summarizes information from four locally-developed recovery plans for "management units" (MUs) encompassing Middle Columbia River tributaries in Washington and Oregon in which 'ESA-listed' Middle Columbia River steelhead populations spawn. NMFS defined the MUs based on State jurisdictional boundaries, as well as on areas where local planning efforts were underway. The Washington Gorge MU contains three planning areas: White Salmon, Klickitat, and Rock Creek subbasins, each with a separate recovery plan.

In developing each of the three Washington Gorge Middle Columbia steelhead recovery plans, NMFS worked closely with our Northwest Fisheries Science Center (NWFSC) Interior Columbia Technical Recovery Team (ICTRT), as well as with, the Yakama Nation, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, and local entities. NMFS recognizes that to achieve recovery of Middle Columbia River steelhead across its geographical range, site-specific actions addressing all limiting factors and threats (habitat, hydropower, hatcheries, harvest, and ecological interactions, including predation and competition) are necessary. The Washington Gorge recovery plans identify and evaluate the relative impacts of this full range of limiting factors and threats. The challenge now for implementation of these plans is coordination among scientists, planners, and implementers on both sides of the Columbia River for sequencing of recovery actions and monitoring for adaptive management.