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**Administration Initiates New Salmon Restoration Efforts**  
*Federal Agency to Review Hatchery Policy; Maintain Protections*

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA fisheries), today announced that it will immediately implement actions to improve salmon protection and recovery efforts, including a comprehensive, public review of its salmon hatchery policies and increasing its support for local recovery efforts, while maintaining current protections for listed salmon species. The review will also seek to determine if the *A/sea* decision presents any new opportunities for enhancing salmon restoration efforts beyond the traditional scope of the Endangered Species Act. In response to the court decision in *A/sea Valley Alliance v. Evans*, the Administration will focus its energy and resources on rebuilding salmon runs rather than appeal the court's decision.

“Recognizing the successes of local restoration efforts, we are determined to build on this momentum and bring state, local and tribal groups together to discuss salmon restoration efforts in a new and meaningful way,” said Bill Hogarth, NOAA fisheries assistant administrator. “Our goal is to apply the best science and take into account public input in developing a salmon protection model that will benefit people, our environment and ensure healthy fish populations for generations to come.”

Hogarth said the agency will immediately take several steps to respond to the court's order and provide consistency in future ESA listing decisions:

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- NOAA fisheries, working closely with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, will review and finalize its hatchery policy regarding the inclusion of hatchery-bred salmon as part of populations listed under the Endangered Species Act. This policy review will include full opportunity for public input and is expected to be completed by September 2002.
- The agency will also review approximately 20 other ESA listings that include hatchery-bred salmon that may be affected by the final hatchery policy. The process will run concurrently with the hatchery policy review and should be completed within 45 days of completion of the policy review.
- NOAA fisheries will support and encourage local initiatives to restore salmon runs and will become a full partner in those efforts. NOAA fisheries will focus on working with successful local salmon recovery efforts and public/private partnerships such as the Hatchery Scientific Review Group, Puget Sound Shared Strategy, Lower Columbia River Estuary Program and a multitude of local watershed recovery efforts throughout the Northwest and California.
- Working with state, federal, tribal and private partners, NOAA fisheries will continue to protect all currently listed species during the review process.

Details of the agency's actions are contained in its 'Salmon ESA Review Action Plan' available on the Web at <http://www.nwr.noaa.gov>

"We look forward to a thorough review of our hatchery policies that addresses the court's decision in the *A/sea* case in a timely manner, while also ensuring that wild stocks of Pacific salmon are protected during our review," Hogarth said.

In conducting its review and these rebuilding initiatives, the administration will mount a comprehensive outreach effort to hear from state and regional authorities, tribal leaders, sportsmen, conservationists, farmers, interest groups and affected industries. "A key component to a successful salmon protection policy will be the input and cooperation of these communities," Hogarth said. "It is essential that this be an inclusive process that takes into account the diverse interests of the Pacific Northwest region and California."

In taking these steps, NOAA fisheries has been guided by the principles developed by the governors of the four Northwest states - Oregon, Washington, Idaho and Montana. In a set of recommendations announced in July 2000, the governors emphasized the importance of a comprehensive, collaborative and ecosystem-based approach to salmon recovery. The strong leadership of these governors, backed by innovative state conservation programs such as the Oregon Plan for Salmon and Watersheds, and Washington's Statewide Strategy to Recover Salmon, helps ensure the regional salmon recovery efforts will continue unaffected while the hatchery policy is reviewed. "NOAA fisheries looks forward to working with western states affected by salmon listings on these initiatives, and building a salmon restoration program based on consensus and mutual understanding," said Hogarth.

NOAA fisheries listed Oregon coast coho salmon under the ESA in 1998 as a distinct population (called an Evolutionarily Significant Unit or ESU), but did not list hatchery fish that came from the same group. On Sept. 12, 2001, Oregon federal district Judge Michael Hogan set aside the listing, ruling that the agency must include both hatchery and naturally-spawning salmon in its determination of the Oregon coast coho ESA listing status.

NOAA fisheries managers will be seeking public input as they revise the agency's hatchery policy to ensure (consistent with the *A/sea* decision) that when the agency lists an ESU, it lists the entire ESU – whether that ESU includes hatchery fish, naturally spawned fish, or both. The *Alsea* decision found that NOAA fisheries could list an ESU and could determine which populations belonged in the ESU. But once a decision was made to include hatchery fish in the ESU as it was here, all populations – hatchery and natural alike – must be listed or not listed together. Beyond that, the Court's order has raised questions about how NOAA fisheries should consider the use of artificial production in achieving the purposes of the Endangered Species Act when it makes a determination about the natural sustainability of an ESU.

“This decision affords the Northwest region the ability to reevaluate and improve salmon protection efforts,” said Bob Lohn, NOAA fisheries' northwest regional administrator. “By working with local communities to strengthen existing state and federal protections and learning from the successes, including tribal programs, we can build a broad community-based approach to protecting salmon and their critical ecosystems.”

This review, including an open inquiry with public hearings and comment, will examine how the ESA should be applied to those salmon populations that include fish reared in hatcheries. It will also address the extent to which hatchery populations can be used to accelerate recovery, and long-term standards for hatchery operation to assure that hatchery practices will not undermine a rebuilding or recovered population.

Besides Oregon coast coho, NOAA fisheries has listed approximately 20 additional ESUs of salmon and steelhead with hatchery populations that are part of an ESU but not listed. NOAA fisheries intends to begin immediately updating its information on these ESUs, and will review their status in light of this new information and the revised policy. The agency expects to complete these reviews by next fall.

“We will proceed with protection and recovery activities for all listed salmon species,” said Lohn. “We are committed to sustaining the partnerships that we've built to work together on conserving our salmon and steelhead and their ecosystems.”

In addition to maintaining current protections for listed salmon species, NOAA fisheries will seek agreements with other federal agencies, states, tribes and private landowners to maintain existing protections for Oregon coastal coho salmon during the agency's reconsideration of the Oregon coastal coho and other ESUs' listing status.

NOAA fisheries, an agency of the Commerce Department's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation's living marine resources through scientific research, management, enforcement, and the conservation of marine mammals and other protected marine species and their habitat. To learn more about NOAA fisheries, please visit <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov>