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developed and implemented for the California Gnatcatcher in southern California. In a June 21, 1995 letter to NMFS, the Resources Agency emphasized its belief that the conservation and recovery of coho salmon in California can best be accomplished by development and implementation of a NCCP conservation program and promulgation of a special section 4(d) rule because of the complex nature of the habitats, ownership patterns, and interests within the range of coho salmon. In this regard, the Resources Agency has strongly urged that NMFS propose coho salmon in California be listed as threatened so that the full flexibility of section 4(d) rulemaking can be retained and the NCCP planning process can move forward. NMFS believes that the NCCP conservation planning process envisioned by the Resources Agency is the best approach for developing and implementing a successful conservation and recovery strategy for coho salmon in California. However, NMFS also believes it is essential that a NCCP program be developed and implemented as quickly as possible in order to arrest the decline of coho salmon populations in this ESU and promote their successful recovery. In its letter to NMFS, the Resources Agency recognizes the importance of making demonstrable progress in developing an acceptable program for conserving coho salmon in California.

Based on the uncertainty of the data and the high potential for success of the developing NCCP conservation plan, NMFS concludes that the central California coast coho salmon ESU should be proposed for listing as a threatened species. However, during the period between publication of this proposed rule and publication of any final rule, NMFS will be gathering additional information to aid in making a final determination concerning the status of this ESU. Specifically, NMFS will: (1) Gather additional biological information on the status of coho salmon populations in this ESU; (2) attempt to assess the response of coho populations to the fishery conservation measures implemented by the PFMC; (3) review and evaluate any new protective measures implemented by the State of California resulting from the State listing coho south of San Francisco; (4) review and evaluate any additional protective or conservation measures implemented by State or private entities; and (5) evaluate whether the Resources Agency has made satisfactory progress in coordinating the development and implementation of a

long-term conservation and recovery strategy for coho salmon in California.

NMFS will consider the State's progress in developing a coho salmon habitat conservation strategy to be satisfactory if a framework protection plan and associated implementation schedule are developed in coordination with NMFS, non-federal agencies, and stakeholders within the next 9 months. To be effective, this protection plan should include both interim protective measures and a long-term protection and monitoring plan. Any implementation schedule developed for the plan should commit to implementation of the long-term component of the plan within 1–2 years of any final federal listing determination. Finally, any protection plan must incorporate increased monitoring of coho salmon populations and habitat conditions so that the continuing status of individual populations can be assessed, and the effectiveness of conservation measures can be evaluated. This coordination effort by the Resources Agency should focus on facilitating the development of local Coordinated Resource Management Planning (CRMP) groups which in turn could be integrated into larger scale bioregional planning groups. This would provide for regional coordination of locally based efforts to improve coho salmon habitat conditions. In the event that NMFS determines there is any new information indicating that coho salmon populations in this ESU are at greater risk of extinction than is currently believed, or that satisfactory progress is not being made by the Resources Agency on developing and implementing a coho conservation program, then NMFS will reconsider this determination in its final rulemaking.

2. Southern Oregon/northern California coasts-NMFS examined all available data for naturally-reproducing coho salmon in this ESU. Because this ESU includes spawning runs in both southern Oregon and northern California, information available for inland recoveries and spawning escapements differ widely by geographic area. Data for the Oregon portion of this ESU include adult passage counts at Gold Ray Dam in the upper Rogue River (Cramer et al. 1985), angler catch estimates for all Oregon rivers (ODFW 1992, 1993), and seinesurvey estimates of adult coho salmon run size in the Rogue River (Cramer 1994).

Recently, most coho salmon production in the Oregon portion has been in the Rogue River. Recent run-size

estimates (1979-86, Cramer 1994) have ranged from approximately 800 to 19,800 naturally-produced adults, and from 500 to 8,300 hatchery-produced adults. Average run sizes for this period were 4,900 natural and 3,900 hatchery fish, with the total run averaging 45 percent hatchery fish. Adult passage counts at Gold Ray Dam provide a longterm view of coho salmon abundance in the upper Rogue River (Cramer et al. 1985). In the 1940's, passage counts averaged approximately 2,000 adults per year. Numbers declined and fluctuated during the 1950's and early 1960's, then stabilized at an average of fewer than 200 adults during the late 1960's and early 1970's. In the late 1970's, the run increased with returning fish produced at Cole Rivers Hatchery. Angler catch of coho salmon in the Rogue River fluctuated considerably, ranging from less than 50 (late 1970's) to a peak of about 800 in 1991; average annual catch over the last 10 years has been about 250 fish. Angler catch in other rivers in southern Oregon has been low, representing only a minor fraction of the total south of Cape Blanco.

While there have been no directed spawner surveys for coho salmon in this region, the species would be expected to be observed in the annual chinook salmon spawner surveys. However, few coho salmon have been observed in these surveys; for example, in 23 years of chinook salmon surveys in six segments of the Elk River, the highest count of coho salmon was 20 adults in 1971. In Oregon south of Cape Blanco, Nehlsen et al. (1991) considered all but two coho salmon stocks to be at high risk of extinction; of the remaining two, one (Euchre Creek) was identified as extinct and the other (Hunter Creek) was not mentioned. (The status of coho salmon in Euchre Creek is in some doubt: No surveys have been conducted recently, but ODFW biologists believe there may be a small coho salmon population there.) South of Cape Blanco, all Oregon coho salmon stocks were rated by Nickelson et al. (1992) as depressed.

Most information for the northern California region of this ESU was recently summarized by the CDFG (CDFG 1994). They concluded that "coho salmon in California, including hatchery stocks, could be less than 6 percent of their abundance during the 1940's, and have experienced at least a 70 percent decline in numbers since the 1960's" (CDFG 1994, p. 5–6). The Klamath River Basin (including the Trinity River) historically supported abundant coho salmon runs. In both systems, runs have been greatly