

## Press Release

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### **SUIT FILED TO FORCE CONSERVATION OF WILLAMETTE RIVER FISH A Decade Without Protection is Enough**

Portland, OR — Willamette Riverkeeper and Northwest Environmental Defense Center (NEDC) filed suit today to force the conservation of imperiled Willamette River fish, including chinook, steelhead, bull trout and Oregon chub. Although these fish stocks were listed as protected under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) in the 1990's [AS EARLY AS 1993-CHUB], the federal agencies responsible for conserving the fish have failed to comply with the Endangered Species Act and complete a Biological Opinion. Specifically, the 13 federally dams in the Willamette Basin harm fish in numerous ways, but since 2000, the federal agencies have been in gridlock over consultation and a biological opinion.

“We have been very patient with this process” said Travis Williams, Executive Director of Willamette Riverkeeper. “But, there has been little progress and almost no resources dedicated by the Corps in over nine years to finish this Biological Opinion for the Willamette. Through this action, we are telling them that the health and recovery of native fish in the Willamette River Basin is a priority for us and many others, and should be a priority for them.”

Dams and reservoirs directly and indirectly cause a number of detrimental effects on fish populations, particularly salmonids, in the Willamette Basin. Dams block passage of fish to historical spawning grounds and potentially important feeding areas, and passage through dams can directly kill fish. Adverse effects on fish habitat from dam operations may include increased water temperature, erosion, water quality problems such as excess turbidity, food source disruption, nutrient depletion, and the destruction of river morphological features.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers owns and operates the thirteen major dams in the Willamette Basin. The primary uses of the dams include the storage of water for irrigation purposes and flood control, the creation of recreation areas in the form of reservoirs, and hydropower. The Bureau of Reclamation markets water stored by the Willamette Basin dams through water service contracts. Four stocks of fish in the Willamette Basin qualified for protection under the ESA in 1993, 1998 and 1999. In April, 2000, the Corps submitted a Biological Assessment to the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (“FWS”) to begin the ESA consultation process. But, the agencies have never completed consultation and issued a Biological Opinion.

“NEDC has a regional reputation for being fair and reasonable,” said Mark Riskedahl, Executive Director of NEDC. “We are hopeful that the last resort of legal action will help the agencies see clear to completing a biological opinion that will conserve the fish in the Willamette.”

“The lawsuit is intended to motivate the agencies to stick to a timeline and finally comply with the law,” stated Stephanie Parent of the Pacific Environmental Advocacy Center (PEAC) who filed the Complaint.

*Read the Complaint [www.peaclaw.org](http://www.peaclaw.org)*