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# Rebuild Of 113-Year Old Fish Hatchery Challenged

**Jun 04, 2014**

WILD FISH CONSERVANCY

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## Rebuild Of 113-Year Old Fish Hatchery Challenged

Wednesday June 4, 2014 – On Friday, May 30, Wild Fish Conservancy, a Puget Sound-based conservation group, appealed a “shorelines substantial development permit” issued by King County for the Tokul Creek State Fish Hatchery. The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) requested the permit to conduct over \$3 million of work at the hatchery located in unincorporated King County, near Snoqualmie. The hatchery is on Tokul Creek, a tributary of the Snoqualmie River. Both waterbodies are important habitat for wild salmonids, including Puget Sound Chinook and Puget Sound steelhead, both listed under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA). The group’s appeal also includes a request for a full environmental impact statement, challenging WDFW’s decision that the environmental impacts of the project are “non-significant.”

In 2008, WDFW proposed closing the facility, but their proposal was met with public outrage from some local fishermen. The agency decided instead to rebuild the facility, starting with a new diversion dam and water intake. The total cost of the planned work at the hatchery exceeds \$5 million. The vast majority of the fish raised at the hatchery are “Chambers Creek” winter-run steelhead, but their release has not been scientifically reviewed and approved by the federal NOAA Fisheries Service for compliance with the ESA. The hatchery also raises some non-native trout for novelty purposes. The hatchery was built by King County in 1901 and transferred to the state in the 1930’s.

“Contrary to popular belief, WDFW hatcheries are not helping to recover wild steelhead; instead, research shows hatcheries are harming wild steelhead and impeding their chances for recovery,” said Kurt Beardslee, executive director of Wild Fish Conservancy. “Here, WDFW plans to spend millions of dollars on a steelhead hatchery without the legal permission required to release the fish they raise. And this is just one hatchery. The state has budgeted millions of dollars to rebuild a number of hatcheries without ever looking at the individual impacts, let alone the cumulative impacts to wild salmon and steelhead recovery efforts.”

Information from WDFW indicates that the state hatchery system has an impending need for over \$150 million to update the facilities[1]. In addition to over eighty state fish hatcheries, there are a number of hatcheries operated by the federal government and tribal governments. In the meantime, a growing body of scientific evidence indicates that hatchery fish slow or even prevent the recovery of wild salmonids. The evidence is particularly strong for “Chambers Creek” hatchery steelhead, the main product of the Tokul Creek facility. And while ESA-listings of Puget Sound salmonids are over a decade old, there are very few hatchery programs that have been scientifically reviewed and approved by the NOAA Fisheries Service (the Tokul steelhead program has not been). In fact, there has never been a comprehensive review of the hatchery paradigm in Washington in terms of the dollars spent compared to the harm done

to wild fish recovery.

“Ironically, WDFW is spending millions of dollars on hatcheries which in turn undermines the millions in public dollars invested in wild fish recovery,” Beardslee continued. “Public dollars spent on habitat and restoration are investments that pay dividends into the future, but often public dollars spent on hatcheries are investments that compromise the future.”

Earlier this year, the group settled a lawsuit with WDFW that alleged that the release of Chambers Creek steelhead into Puget Sound’s rivers violated the ESA. WDFW agreed to curtail most Puget Sound-area releases, including those from the Tokul Creek facility, until they received legal permission from the NOAA Fisheries Service.

The appeal was filed to the Shorelines Hearings Board. Wild Fish Conservancy is represented by Smith and Lowney, PLLC, of Seattle.

Attachments:

- **Filed Petition & Attachments - May 30, 2014**
- **WFC Comments on Tokul Creek King County Shoreline Permit - July 17, 2013**
- **WFC Comments on Tokul Creek SEPA Determination of Nonsignificance - January 28, 2013**

1 <http://wdfw.wa.gov/hatcheries/overview.html> Accessed June 2, 2014. “For all these efforts, the need for additional investments in the state's aging hatchery infrastructure was identified long before the announcement of the latest round of ESA listings in 1999 (reaffirmed in 2005, and again in 2011). The HSRG reviews completed in Puget Sound and Coastal Washington estimated necessary facility renovations could approach and exceed \$150-million... To meet these needs, in 2012, the Washington State Legislature enacted the ‘Jobs Now’ Act to provide an additional investment of \$56.7-million in capital funds for statewide hatchery infrastructure improvements.”

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