

Major Issues Concerning the McKenzie Fish Management Plan Identified at Public Meetings and in Written Comments

Issue 1. Continuation of the summer steelhead program

Option A. Discontinue stocking summer steelhead smolts

Rationale:

1. Competition between summer steelhead and native species would be eliminated.
2. Low flows and limited bank access below Leaburg Dam restrict angling access in a large section of the river where steelhead angling occurs. Steelhead anglers crowd the areas where steelhead concentrate, particularly in the 2-mile section below Leaburg Dam.
3. Smolts scheduled for release in the McKenzie River could be used to increase releases in other tributaries of the Willamette River, such as the Middle Fork.
4. Survival of smolts released in the McKenzie River is relatively low compared to some other Willamette tributaries.

Option B. Continue to maintain a run of summer steelhead into the McKenzie River by stocking smolts, as proposed in the draft plan.

Rationale:

1. A popular steelhead sport fishery has developed on the McKenzie River. About 85% of all of the anglers surveyed on the river in 1986 indicated that the summer steelhead program should be continued.
2. The McKenzie River contains suitable habitat for holding adults and for angling. The plan contains actions to address steelhead angling access and crowding problems below Leaburg Dam.
3. Smolt survival is adequate to produce a sufficient return to provide a fishery with a satisfactory catch rate. The plan contains actions designed to increase smolt survival.
4. The addition of summer steelhead increases the diversity of angling opportunities in the subbasin.
5. The draft plan contains actions to reduce competition between summer steelhead and native salmonids.

ODFW staff and citizens advisory committee recommendation: Option B

## Issue 2. Stocking location for summer steelhead smolts

Option A. Release all summer steelhead smolts below Leaburg Dam, as proposed in the draft plan

### Rationale:

1. Spawning and rearing competition between summer steelhead and native salmonids would be reduced. Summer steelhead have been observed spawning in tributaries above Leaburg Dam at the same time and in the same locations as native trout. Wild summer steelhead smolts have also been collected in the downstream migrant trap at Leaburg Dam.
2. Smolt survival rates should increase since hatchery smolts would not be harvested in the trout fishery above Leaburg Dam and fewer smolts would pass through Walterville Canal.
3. Conflicts between steelhead and trout anglers above Leaburg Dam, where the most intensive trout angling occurs, would be reduced.
4. Concentrating adults in the lower river is expected to increase the steelhead catch.

Option B. Release summer steelhead smolts above and below Leaburg Dam

### Rationale:

1. The river above Leaburg Dam has suitable holding habitat for adults, good boat access, and ample flows for angling.
2. Angling pressure would be dispersed.

ODFW staff and citizens advisory committee recommendation: Option A

## Issue 3. Area for stocking hatchery trout

Option A. Include the section below Hayden Bridge and/or above McKenzie Bridge in the area stocked with hatchery trout.

### Rationale:

1. Angling opportunity for hatchery trout would be spread over a greater area of the river.
2. Although access is limited, stream angling for hatchery trout would be available closer to the Eugene/Springfield metro area.
3. Angling for hatchery trout would be available closer to resorts located above McKenzie Bridge.

Option B. Stock hatchery trout from Hayden Bridge to McKenzie Bridge and sections of Blue River and the South Fork, as proposed in the draft plan.

Rationale:

1. This section of the mainstem has good access for boat angling and hatchery trucks and is navigable by the planting boat. The planting boat permits the trout to be uniformly distributed throughout the area stocked. Because of the whitewater above McKenzie Bridge, the planting boat cannot be safely used to stock that section.
2. The area between McKenzie Bridge and Paradise Campground is difficult for public boat and bank angling because of the steep gradient, brushy shorelines, and private ownership. There are also few bank and boat angling access sites below Hayden Bridge. As a result, the catch rate for hatchery trout above McKenzie Bridge and below Hayden Bridge would probably not meet the minimum required by the Trout Plan and the Willamette Plan (40% of the number released) to economically justify stocking hatchery trout in those areas.
3. The river below Hayden Bridge is one of the most productive sections of the river for wild rainbow and cutthroat trout in terms of abundance and size of fish.
4. Anglers have indicated high interest in managing the section of the river below Hayden Bridge for wild trout.
5. Hatchery trout have not been stocked below Hayden Bridge or above Paradise Campground in recent years. Guideline 2 of the Resident Trout section of the Willamette Basin Fish Management Plan (1986) (OAR 635-500-215) states, "Yearling trout will not be stocked in streams or sections of streams that are not currently stocked."
6. Competition between hatchery and wild trout in unstocked areas would be minimized.

ODFW staff and citizens advisory committee recommendation: Option B

Issue 4. Harvest restrictions to protect wild trout

Below Hayden Bridge

Option A. Maintain production and catch rate of wild trout below Hayden Bridge

This objective entails:

--No stocking of hatchery trout

--Continuation of current trout regulations allowing harvest of wild trout with bait, artificial lures, and flies

Rationale:

1. This is one of the most productive sections of the river for wild rainbow and cutthroat trout in terms of abundance and size of fish. The wild trout population could sustain some harvest, and relatively high numbers of wild trout could still be maintained.
2. Some anglers currently fish in this section with bait for trout, spring chinook, and summer steelhead.
3. Angling pressure and harvest of wild trout in this section are not likely to increase rapidly because of limited access and because hatchery trout are not stocked in this section. If monitoring, as called for in the draft plan, indicate that wild trout populations and harvest are declining, harvest restrictions can be imposed at that time.
4. Voluntary catch-and-release of wild fish could be more aggressively promoted.

Option B. Manage for optimum production and catch rate of wild trout below Hayden Bridge, as proposed in the draft plan

This objective entails:

- No stocking of hatchery trout
- Mandatory catch-and-release of wild trout
- Use of only artificial lures or flies with barbless hooks for trout angling

Rationale:

1. Harvest and hooking mortality of wild trout in this section may reduce the potential catch rate below the optimum possible. Catch-and-release and gear restrictions will insure that wild trout populations and potential catch rate will reach and will be maintained at optimum levels.
2. Current plans to develop another boat ramp in this section, if successful, will increase angling pressure and harvest of wild trout.
3. The quality of the wild trout fishery and the diversity of angling opportunities in the subbasin would be increased, despite a potential increase in angling pressure.
4. The trout season could be extended, which would increase angling opportunities with minimal impact on wild trout populations.

ODFW staff and citizens advisory committee recommendation: Option B with the following provisions proposed in the draft plan:

- Bait angling for trout would be permitted down to approximately 300 yards below Hayden Bridge, a popular trout fishing area.
- Bait angling for spring chinook and summer steelhead would be permitted throughout this section on barbless hooks with 1/2-inch (size 1/0) and larger gaps.

## Above Hayden Bridge

Option C. Allow a harvest of wild trout under current regulations

### Rationale:

1. The proportion of wild trout in angler catches does not appear to have declined significantly since 1974, based on creel surveys conducted in 1974 and 1983. If further monitoring, as called for in the draft plan, indicates that wild trout populations and harvest are declining, harvest restrictions can be imposed at that time.
2. Regulations requiring the use of artificial lures or flies with barbless hooks and release of all wild trout caught are being recommended for the McKenzie River below Hayden Bridge. McKenzie River anglers surveyed in 1986 were about equally divided in their preferences for allowing harvest of trout under current regulations versus requiring release of wild trout.
3. If stocking of hatchery trout is reduced between Hayden Bridge and Leaburg Dam and discontinued above McKenzie Bridge and in the Mohawk River as proposed in objectives 2 and 4 of the Resident Trout section of the plan, production and catch rate of wild trout should increase through reductions in competition and angling pressure, even if harvest of wild trout is allowed.
4. About half of the anglers use bait. Use of bait results in an estimated mortality of 20-60% of the trout caught and released. Regulations allowing harvest of wild trout would permit anglers to keep injured fish rather than require their release. Regulations to reduce hooking and handling mortality of wild trout by eliminating the use of bait would not be appropriate in the section between Hayden Bridge and Leaburg Dam where the steelhead and spring chinook fishery occurs and will reduce the catch of hatchery trout in stocked sections below the established guidelines in the Trout and Willamette Basin plans.
5. Guideline 2 of the trout section of McKenzie Plan states that release of wild trout will be actively encouraged, and all hatchery trout will be marked so anglers can more easily identify wild trout and release them if they desire.

Option D. Prohibit the harvest of wild trout

Rationale:

1. Catch-and-release of wild trout would be necessary to significantly reduce the harvest of wild trout. A partial reduction in the bag limit would not be effective since the average catch per angler of wild trout is less than 1 fish/day. A reduction in the length of the season would reduce angling opportunity. Elimination of the use of bait would reduce angling opportunities for a large number of anglers and is not considered appropriate where the steelhead and spring chinook fishery is concentrated and where hatchery trout are stocked. If the harvest of wild trout is prohibited in the mainstem above McKenzie Bridge, gear restrictions (i.e., use of artificial lures with barbless hooks only) should be considered for that section since it is being managed for wild trout.
2. From 40% to 80% of the wild fish caught on bait and released by anglers would survive, and that percentage could be increased by a public education program that emphasized proper release techniques.
3. Without additional harvest restrictions, increased angling pressure from Leaburg Dam to McKenzie Bridge could further reduce wild trout populations in that section.
4. Prohibiting harvest of wild trout throughout the mainstem instead of just the section below Hayden Bridge would simplify angling regulations.
5. The 1986 angler survey indicates that about half of the McKenzie River anglers support regulations requiring the release of wild trout. That support should increase through public education efforts as proposed in Guideline 2 in the trout section of the plan.

Recommendation:

ODFW staff recommends Option C.

The citizens advisory committee recommends Option D.