PROGRESS REPORT - October 29, 1987

Fish management plan - Yachats River

- Management plan adopted by the commission 1979.
- Objectives 1, 2, and 3 are being met. Most landowners have expressed a desire to stay with wild steelhead only and a new STEP chapter is involved in habitat projects (objective 4). We have not met objective 5. There is not enough water to operate a hatchery (objective 6).

1979 adopted

# FISH MANAGEMENT PLAN

# YACHATS RIVER

OREGON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

Fish Division
August 1979

# YACHATS RIVER
# FISH MANAGEMENT PLAN

## INTRODUCTION

The Yachats River is a moderate-sized tributary to the Pacific Ocean containing 55 stream miles and a small estuary (Fig. 1). This is an excellent small system that is not stocked with hatchery fish since the habitat is capable of producing a good population of wild fish. The stream receives light angling pressure; but we believe this will increase and more restrictive angling regulations may eventually be needed, although none are necessary now.

The Yachats produces resident and anadromous cutthroat trout, fall chinook and coho salmon, and winter steelhead. Releases of hatchery steelhead were terminated in 1969; cutthroat trout in 1978; and the only known release of salmon was made in 1958. There are no special angling regulations in effect at present.

Maintenance of water quality, summertime streamflows, riparian vegetation, and prevention of stream channel alterations are key elements in protecting the capability of this stream to sustain natural production of all salmonids.

In July 1979, the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission accepted the following Department recommendations regarding management of fish populations in the Yachats River:

1. The Yachats River will be managed for wild trout.

2. The Yachats River will be managed for wild steelhead for the immediate future. However, if ODFW determines that steelheaders are opposed to this option, the Fish and Wildlife Commission will consider authorizing the release of hatchery smolts to enhance the fishery.

3. The choice of a management option for salmon will be deferred until a coast-wide salmon management plan is developed. At that time, staff biologists will decide on a final recommendation to the Fish and Wildlife Commission regarding the need or desirability for releasing hatchery salmon into the system.

## HABITAT

Land ownership includes the US Forest Service, Department of Fish and Wildlife, and private owners. The lower valley is grazed by cattle, while the upper watershed produces timber. The ODFW is establishing an elk management area in the Yachats Valley.

Stream gradients vary from flat to moderately steep. Approximately 13 miles of the main stem average 20 feet in width. High water temperatures are not a limiting factor. Riparian vegetation ranges from poor to good. There are no major barriers to fish passage in the system. Spawning gravel appears

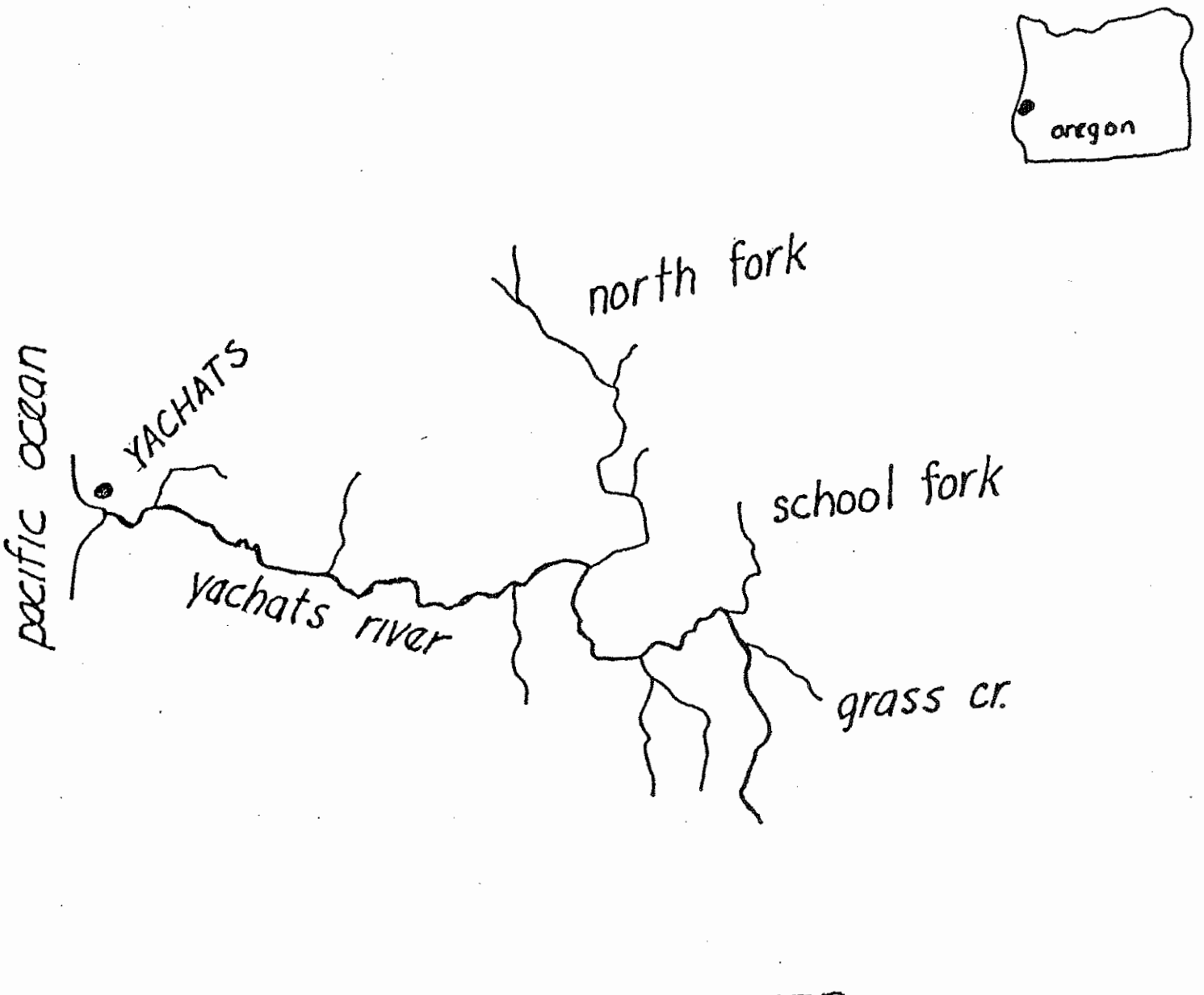


Fig. 1. Yachats River

adequate for existing fish populations. Streamflow is typically coastal--freshets caused by winter storms, major runoff in the spring, and low flows by late summer.

## TROUT

### Populations

Resident and sea-run cutthroat are found throughout the system. No population estimates have been made, but the anadromous component probably numbers only several hundred fish.

Growth rates have not been calculated for resident cutthroat rearing in the Yachats. Until such information is obtained we assume it is similar to that determined for the Siuslaw and Alsea where fish lengths average 2.0 inches at 1 year, 5.5 inches at 2 years, 7.0 inches at 3 years, and 8.5 inches at 4 years. The migratory segment of the population remains in fresh water 2 to 4 years before entering the estuary at an average size of about 9 inches in length.

### Fishery

Public access is fair. A road adjacent to the stream extends from the mouth of the Yachats upstream approximately 14 miles to the mouth of Grass Creek. There is a developed boat ramp near Highway 101.

A light spring fishery has existed on the Yachats even when legal-sized hatchery cutthroat were stocked. The magnitude of the fall fishery is light; but it too is probably small since no hatchery fish are presently stocked, the estuary is small, and the Yachats is located between two large systems (Alsea and Siuslaw), both of which have sizable cutthroat fisheries.

## STEELHEAD

### Populations

The annual run size of wild winter steelhead is unknown; however, we believe it averages less than 1,000 fish per year. Catch records indicate that adult steelhead are in the stream from December until after the season closes April 1 each year. The life-history of Yachats winter steelhead is probably similar to other coastal stocks in that smolts migrate downstream after 2 years in fresh water and adults return to spawn after 2 years in the ocean. Returning adult steelhead utilize about 44 miles of the system's 55 miles of stream.

### Fishery

Only the lower 9 miles of the main stem (up to the North Fork) are open to steelhead angling. The season in recent years has been from late May through March 31 of the following year; however, steelhead are mainly caught from December through March. The bag limit is 2 fish per angler per day. During

winter freshets many steelhead pass through the open water into closed areas and thus are not fished upon.

Catch records for the 6-year period 1972-77 indicate the annual catch has declined from about 150 to 50 steelhead per year. Whether this represents a reduced fish population or decline in effort is unknown. In most years, the catch is evenly distributed from December through March.

## SALMON

### Populations

The Yachats supports small annual runs of coho and fall chinook salmon. Although these run estimates are subjective, we believe they average about 1,500 and 500 fish, respectively, per year. Routine index surveys of spawning fish are not made in the system. Both runs rely on natural production as hatchery reared salmon are not stocked in the Yachats. Coho use about 44 miles and chinook 14 miles of stream in the system. Life-history of both species is probably similar to other midcoast stocks.

The Yachats was identified in the late 1960's as having high potential to support a public hatchery for coho and fall chinook based on water quality and quantity, land availability, and other criteria. Although efforts to develop a hatchery have not been pursued, the system still has this potential and we believe this option should be indefinitely held open pending future need for facilities and funding. Fish reared in a public facility could be used to stock salmon into nearby coastal streams. Due to its potential as a site for a public hatchery, the Yachats is closed by law to the construction of private salmon hatcheries.

### Fishery

Salmon produced in the Yachats are taken in the ocean salmon fisheries off the Pacific coast in common with similar stocks produced elsewhere. A few are also caught in the stream when they return to spawn. The annual catch is less than 75 fish per year based on salmon-steelhead license estimates.

## OBJECTIVES

1. Maintain natural fish production capabilities of the stream system by applying existing laws and regulations to protect and improve stream habitat and riparian vegetation. This largely involves close coordination with private landowners and public agencies controlling the use of water and adjacent land resources and in taking action to stem habitat losses.

2. Assure adequate spawning escapements of all species.

3. Obtain preliminary fish population information. Determine size distribution, age composition, relative numbers, and fish condition. Repeat in subsequent years for comparison.

4. Determine the attitude of local fishermen and others toward management of the Yachats steelhead exclusively for wild fish.

5. Determine the landing rate of steelhead in hours per fish to obtain information on relative quality of fishing.

6. Determine the need and desirability of constructing a hatchery on the Yachats River.