

Progress Report - October 29, 1987

Fish Management Plan - Middle Creek (tributary to North Fork
Coquille River)

- Management plan adopted by the Commission 1979

- The habitat objective is being met but population data
has not been gathered.

1979 adjusted

FISH MANAGEMENT PLAN

MIDDLE CREEK
(Tributary of North Fork Coquille River)

OREGON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

Fish Division
August 1979

MIDDLE CREEK ^{1/} FISH MANAGEMENT PLAN

INTRODUCTION

Middle Creek (Fig. 1) is a large tributary of the North Fork Coquille River, entering at RM 19. The stream is about 62 miles long, but only 45 miles are available to anadromous fish. The watershed contains fair to good habitat, and physical stream survey information has been collected.

Middle Creek contains resident and anadromous cutthroat trout, winter steelhead, and coho salmon. Hatchery fish are not released into the system. There are no special angling regulations in effect at present. In July 1979, the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission accepted the Department's recommendation to continue to manage Middle Creek for wild trout and steelhead. Choosing a management option for salmon will be deferred until ODFW develops a coast-wide salmon management plan. At that time, staff biologists will decide on a final recommendation to the Commission regarding the need or desirability for releasing hatchery salmon into Middle Creek.

HABITAT

The lower 10 miles of Middle Creek and lower Cherry Creek, its largest tributary, have high water temperatures, sedimentation, and stream bank erosion problems. Most of the watershed is in timber production and road access, especially along the streams, is good. Ownership is mixed public and private. Riparian vegetation ranges from poor to good and gradient varies from flat to steep. There appears to be an adequate amount of spawning gravel for the fish population present. The lower 23 miles of the main stem average 22 feet in width.

TROUT

Populations

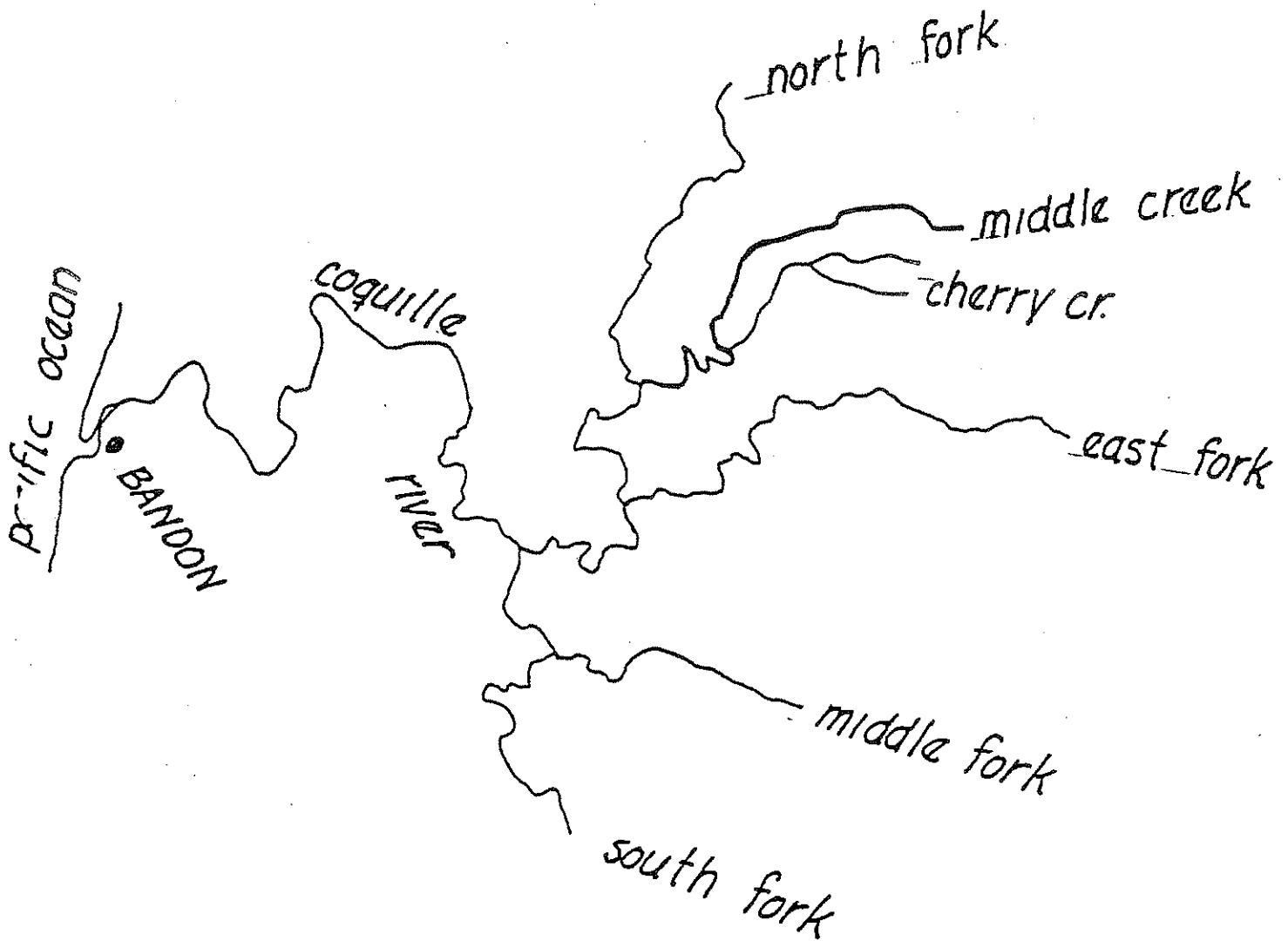
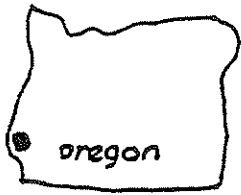
Population data have not been collected, but good numbers of trout have been noted throughout the system. Hatchery fish are not stocked into Middle Creek, but cutthroat are released into the North Fork Coquille above the mouth of Middle Creek, and there are no barriers to keep out strays.

Fishery

Public access is good. The system has adequate roads and five public parks are located in the system.

We have estimated about 1,200 angler visits annually with more than one half on the main stem. Few anglers fish for the small resident cutthroat, and the sea-runs are only lightly exploited above the estuary.

^{1/} Tributary to the North Fork Coquille River.



MIDDLE CREEK

Fig. 1. Middle Creek

STEELHEAD

Populations

An estimated 1,000 to 2,000 winter steelhead per year use 45 miles of this watershed. Middle Creek has not been stocked with hatchery steelhead; however, 160,000 to 170,000 smolts per year are released into the Coquille system. Of this total, 70,000 per year are stocked in the North and East forks. Many of these probably return to Middle Creek as spawning adults. We estimate one half of the adult steelhead are naturally produced within the Coquille system.

Fishery

The main stem up to Cherry Creek (7.4 miles) is open to steelhead fishing. The general season and bag limit of Zone 1 applies. There are no special regulations aside from the deadline. Steelhead are mainly harvested in the North Fork and main stem Coquille. Middle Creek receives light angling pressure, and total catch is believed to be less than 50 fish in most years. This stream is a primary production unit rather than an important fishing stream for winter steelhead.

SALMON

Populations

Routine spawning fish index surveys are made on Middle Creek. We estimate Middle Creek can support annual runs of 4,400 coho and 450 fall chinook salmon. Coho escapements from 1976 through 1978 were well below this level, similar to the general coast-wide downward trend in natural spawning escapements. Populations of chinook salmon appear to be maintaining substantial escapement levels, although the numbers vary; conditions for counting also vary.

Salmon stocks in Middle Creek rely on natural production as hatchery fish are not released into this stream. Coho eggs, fingerlings, or adults surplus to hatchery needs were released in the stream in 1963 and 1965. There are no immediate plans to resume stocking Middle Creek with hatchery fish or eggs. Coho presently use about 36 miles and fall chinook 18 miles of stream in the system. Life-histories of coho and fall chinook in the Coquille are probably similar to other south coast stocks.

Fishery

Coho and fall chinook produced in this stream are caught in major commercial and sport ocean fisheries off the Pacific Coast in common with stocks produced elsewhere. Some are also caught by sport fishermen in the main stem Coquille and in the North Fork when adults return to spawn; however, this catch is small. We have no records to indicate salmon are caught in Middle Creek.

OBJECTIVES

1. Maintain natural fish production capabilities of the stream system by applying existing laws and regulations to protect and improve stream habitat. 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. Maintain adult escapements at levels necessary for optimum utilization of fish producing capabilities of the system. This would amount to determining if the available habitat in Middle Creek is fully used and in taking appropriate management action to assure the stream is seeded to optimum levels with juveniles. For salmon, this might involve releasing hatchery fish into the stream.
3. Obtain preliminary population information by sampling representative stream sections. Determine size distribution, age composition, numbers, and fish condition. Repeat periodically for comparison.