

State of California
Regional Water Quality Control Board
San Diego Region

EXECUTIVE OFFICER SUMMARY REPORT
April 11, 2018

ITEM: 10

SUBJECT: Informational Item: Presentation from the South Coast Steelhead Coalition on Status and Recovery Efforts in the San Diego Region. (*Chad Loflen*)

PURPOSE: The informational item was requested by Board Member Strawn. The request and purpose of the item is to inform and update the public and the Board on the status of and recovery efforts for the endangered Southern California steelhead in the San Diego Region. Dr. Sandra Jacobson of the South Coast Steelhead Coalition will be presenting to the Board.

RECOMMENDATION: This is an informational item and the Board will not take an action.

KEY ISSUES: The Southern California steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) is one of the species identified in the San Diego Water Board Basin Plan for the RARE Beneficial Use. Spawning, rearing, and refuge habitat for steelhead are key areas within the key habitats and ecosystems Beneficial Uses.

PRACTICAL VISION: The recovery of Southern California steelhead supports the San Diego Water Board's goal to achieve healthy waters through collaboration, reliance on the latest science, and prioritizing and using meaningful environmental indicators to measure water quality outcomes.

DISCUSSION: Southern California steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) in the San Diego Region were federally listed as an endangered species in 2002, with critical habitat in the San Diego Region identified within the San Juan and San Mateo watersheds on January 05, 2006. The South Coast Steelhead Coalition includes participants from over 25 governmental and non-governmental organizations working together to restore stable steelhead populations in high priority watersheds in San Diego and Orange Counties.

The Southern California steelhead is an anadromous species of salmon native to the Pacific Coast. Salmon are anadromous as

they are born in freshwater, migrate to saltwater as juveniles, and return to freshwater as adults to reproduce. Unlike other species of salmon, adult steelhead do not die after traveling from the ocean into freshwater rivers and streams to spawn.

The life cycle of steelhead generally involves rearing in freshwater for one to three years before migrating to the ocean and spending from one to four years maturing in the marine environment before returning to spawn in freshwater. The ocean phase provides a reproductive advantage because individuals that feed and mature in the ocean grow substantially larger than native freshwater residents, and larger females produce proportionately more eggs; however, the freshwater phase provides a protected rearing environment, relatively free of competition and predators. Nonanadromous steelhead that spend their entire life cycle in freshwater are commonly referred to as rainbow trout.

Southern California steelhead were listed as an endangered species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) on August 18, 1997. [A final listing determination](#) was issued on January 5, 2006 for the Southern California Steelhead Distinct Population Segment (DPS); critical habitat was also designated within 32 DPS watersheds. In the San Diego Region, critical habitat was designated for:

- Lower San Juan Creek
- Middle Trabuco Creek
- San Mateo Creek

In January 2012 NMFS released a [Southern California Steelhead Recovery Plan](#). The Southern California steelhead Recovery Planning Area extends from the Santa Maria River to the Tijuana River at the U.S.-Mexico border (Supporting Document 1). It includes both those portions of coastal watersheds that are at least seasonally accessible to steelhead entering from the ocean, and the upstream portions of watersheds that are currently inaccessible to steelhead due to man-made barriers but were historically used by steelhead.

The basic goal of the Southern California Steelhead Recovery Plan is to recover anadromous steelhead and ensure the long-term persistence of self-sustaining wild populations of steelhead across the DPS – and ultimately to remove southern California steelhead from the Federal List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife. The Recovery Plan proposes to accomplish this goal by addressing factors limiting the species ability to survive and

naturally reproduce in the wild within a set of core watershed populations distributed across the Recovery Planning Area. Threats to Southern California steelhead are many, and include poor water quality, loss of spawning and rearing habitat, flow diversions and groundwater over-drafting, stream channelization and barriers, fires, and non-native species such as bullhead, sunfishes, bass, crayfish, and bullfrogs. The Recovery Plan provides a watershed-by watershed habitat assessment of threats to the species, and a set of recovery actions to address these threats.

The [South Coast Steelhead Coalition](#) (Coalition) is a working group of over 25 governmental and non-governmental organizations whose long-term goal is to address threats and re-establish stable populations of Southern California steelhead in San Diego and Orange Counties. The Coalition has focused on the four watersheds identified as priorities in the Recovery Plan, all of which are within the San Diego Region. They include:

- San Juan
- San Mateo
- Santa Margarita
- San Luis Rey

The establishment of stable individual steelhead populations in multiple watersheds is critical to maintaining a resilient overall population that can withstand watershed specific natural and/or anthropogenic events (e.g. fires, chemical spills, illegal flow diversions) that eliminate or vastly reduce a local population.

Each watershed presents a unique set of steelhead impacts and stressors, as well as opportunities and needs for restoration. The Coalition is actively working with partners to improve conditions in order to provide conditions that will support stable populations in each watershed.

The San Diego Water Board has recognized the importance of the Coalition's efforts, which has identified multiple projects that the San Diego Water Board has made a regional priority through various regulatory and non-regulatory actions, such as the identification of the I-5 Trabuco Fish Passage Project for the recovery of streams, wetlands, and riparian systems under Resolution No. 2015-0020.

Additional information on Southern California steelhead status, history, and efforts can be found on the [USFWS's Steelhead Story Page](#).

LEGAL CONCERNS:

NA

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

1. Southern California Steelhead Recovery Planning Area (Map)
2. Map of Priority Watersheds in the San Diego Region

SIGNIFICANT CHANGES:

NA

COMPLIANCE RECORD:

NA

PUBLIC NOTICE:

This item was publically noticed in the Meeting Notice and Agenda for the April 11, 2018 meeting.