

Attachment (F) - RCWA/GWA Letter 12/5/00
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[Federal Register: October 31, 1996 (Volume 61, Number 212)] [Rules and Regulations]

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 227

[Docket No. 950407093-6298-03; I.D. 012595A]

Endangered and Threatened Species; Threatened Status for Central California Coast Coho Salmon Evolutionarily Significant Unit (ESU)

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Final rule.

SUMMARY: NMFS is issuing a final determination that the Central California coast coho salmon ESU (*Oncorhynchus kisutch*) is a "species" under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973, as amended, and that it will be listed as a threatened species. In the 1940s, estimated abundance of coho salmon in this ESU ranged from 50,000 to 125,000 native coho salmon. Today, it is estimated that there are probably less than 6,000 naturally-reproducing coho salmon. The threats to naturally-reproducing coho salmon are numerous and varied. In the Central California coast ESU, the present depressed condition is the result of several human caused factors (e.g., habitat degradation, harvest, water diversions, and artificial propagation) that exacerbate the adverse effects of natural environmental variability from drought and poor ocean conditions. Existing regulatory mechanisms are either not adequate or not being adequately implemented to provide

for the conservation of the Central California coast coho ESU.

The taking of this species is prohibited, pursuant to section 4(d) and section 9 of the ESA. Certain exceptions to this taking prohibition pursuant to section 10 are provided. The taking prohibitions go into effect as provided in Sec. 227.21.

EFFECTIVE DATE: December 2, 1996.

ADDRESSES: Craig Wingert, NMFS, Southwest Region, Protected Species Management Division, 501 W. Ocean Blvd., Suite 4200, Long Beach, CA 90802-4213, telephone (310/980-4021); or Marta Nammack, NMFS, Office of Protected Resources, 1315 East-West Highway, Silver Spring, MD 20910, telephone (301/713-1401).

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Craig Wingert, telephone (310/980-4021), or Marta Nammack, telephone (301/713-1401).

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

The coho salmon (*Oncorhynchus kisutch*) is an anadromous salmonid species that was historically distributed throughout the North Pacific Ocean from central California to Point Hope, AK, through the Aleutian Islands, and from the Anadyr River, Russia, south to Hokkaido, Japan. Historically, this species probably inhabited most coastal streams in Washington, Oregon, and northern and central California. Some populations, now considered extinct, and believed to have migrated hundreds of miles inland to spawn in tributaries of the upper Columbia River in Washington, and the Snake River in Idaho. In contrast to the life history patterns of other anadromous salmonids, coho salmon on the west coast of North America generally exhibit a relatively simple 3-year life cycle. Adults typically begin their freshwater spawning migration in the late summer and fall, spawn by mid-winter, and then die. Run and spawn timing of adult coho salmon vary between and within coastal and Columbia River Basin populations. Depending on river temperatures, eggs incubate in "redds" (gravel nests excavated by spawning females) for 1.5 to 4 months before hatching as "alevins" (a larval life stage dependent on food stored in a yolk sac). Following yolk sac absorption, alevins emerge from the gravel as young juveniles, or "fry," and begin actively feeding. Juveniles rear in fresh water for up to 15 months, then migrate to the ocean as "smolts" in the spring. Coho salmon typically spend two growing seasons in the ocean before returning