



Washington State Senate
Agriculture, Water, Natural Resources, and Parks Committee
Work Session of January 12, 2021, 1:30 p.m.

Testimony from Greg Topf, Wild Steelhead Coalition

Good afternoon Chair Van De Wege and members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the WDFW's important emergency conservation rule changes for Washington's coastal and Olympic peninsula winter steelhead season.

My name is Greg Topf. I am the Board Chair of the Washington-based Wild Steelhead Coalition (WSC). Our 3800 members are dedicated anglers and include many guides and businesses within the fishing industry. Our coalition is committed to protecting and restoring wild steelhead populations in their native waters to levels that provide self-sustaining runs and economic vitality to local communities.

The WSC was formed twenty years ago when a group of dedicated anglers saw the wild steelhead runs in Puget Sound collapse. Today, we are now on a knife's edge of the exact same thing happening to the incredible steelhead rivers of Washington's coast.

The warnings of biologists have come true and fishery managers and anglers are being forced to face a stark reality. The Chehalis system is projected to once again miss spawning requirements, as are the Humptulips and the Queets. The Hoh, Upper Quinault and Bogachiel are projected to just barely reach spawning requirements, but the Hoh, Bogachiel and Queets have missed these requirements frequently in the last decade. The bright spots on the coast, the Sol Duc and Calawah are holding relatively steady, but have declined far below historical averages. Yesterday, in response to this reality, the Olympic National Park announced that the Queets River will close to recreational angling on February 1st because of miserable projected return numbers and years of missed spawning requirements.

These are all rivers on the edge of requiring federal intervention under the Endangered Species Act. These protections would undoubtedly close fishing for the recreational angler and likely impact treaty fisheries as well. These closures would be indefinite, as we have seen in Puget Sound. For these reasons, we are pleased to see new leadership from WDFW, finally acknowledging the dire situation, and stepping up with consequential rules to change course on the coast before it is too late.

Our members overwhelmingly support the rule changes. This includes guides who feared complete closures and are happy to still have a season to work, shop owners relieved to keep selling equipment, and private anglers looking forward to spending time on these public waters. These anglers understand that their livelihoods depend on healthy steelhead runs and they are desperate to see proactive, positive steps taken to rebuild their numbers.

While a number of guides and businesses have contacted us, WDFW, and the Commission, in support of the rule changes, I'll remind you that private DIY anglers represent the vast majority of users of these public fisheries. This rule shortens the season for everyone, but it also still allows members of the public months of access to these rivers. These anglers will not only be fishing, but eating at restaurants, crashing at motels,



buying groceries, and filling up their gas tanks throughout OP and coastal communities. Many of them will still hire guides to take them fishing. Complete closures would end this recreational and economic activity.

These emergency rules acknowledge a new reality: If we are going to fish at all, we must all agree to limit our impact and give these watersheds time to rebuild their populations. The anglers in our network recognize this need, are proud to restrain their impact, and are willing to make sacrifices to ensure a fishable future.

We also note that the Hoh and Quillayute tribes have also taken conservation steps to reduce their netting impacts. We applaud this restraint and know effective co-management is only possible when the recreational angling community makes similar efforts to reduce our impact.

In coming years, there will be opportunities to modify and improve the rules, but any changes will need to be *at least as* consequential as this season's, whatever form they may take. Otherwise, we should expect an ESA listing in the very near future and the economic and recreational consequences that come from that designation.

In the end, we expect that spring spawning surveys will show that the rule change was effective. Some day we want steelhead anglers and guides, members of rural communities, and tribal co-managers to look back and see this as the moment when we started to turn around decades of declines instead of losing these runs like so many other Pacific steelhead and salmon fisheries up and down the coast. We have a unique opportunity to get things right on the Washington coast. We have amazing protected habitat and a handful of remaining wild fish to build upon. We have one last window of time, but we must act now and most anglers know it and support the necessary steps.

Thank you for your time,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Greg Topf". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Greg Topf
Board Chair, Wild Steelhead Coalition

Wild Steelhead Coalition: Additional Resources

A Change of Course: Washington Coast and Olympic Peninsula Winter Steelhead Season Rules Finalized
<https://www.wildsteelheadcoalition.org/news/change-of-course>

Winter on the Coast: Upcoming Options for Winter Steelhead on Washington's Coastal Rivers
<https://www.wildsteelheadcoalition.org/news/winter-on-the-coast-2021>

Protecting Wild Fish from Poaching on the Olympic Peninsula: WSC's Ongoing Support of WDFW Law Enforcement
<https://www.wildsteelheadcoalition.org/news/op-law-enforcement>



Wild Steelhead Coalition: Additional Resources, continued:

Steelhead Country - The Last Wilderness (Short Video)

<https://vimeo.com/203790882>

Wild Reverence: The Wild Steelheads Last Stand (Documentary Film)

<https://vimeo.com/490023582/4743403fef>