

Russian River Angler Education Program Fact Sheet

- Central California Coast (CCC) coho salmon are listed as endangered under the state and federal Endangered Species Act. The historical range of Central California Coast coho salmon was from Santa Cruz County to Mendocino County. **Today, the distribution of Central California Coast coho salmon within that range has been severely depleted and they are teetering on the brink of extinction.**
- Historically, coho salmon were documented in 32 streams within the Russian River watershed and the adult population was in the thousands. **Today, they are found in the seven streams where coho salmon are stocked** as part of the broodstock program. In the last decade only a handful of adult coho salmon have returned to the river.
- The Russian River Coho Broodstock Program – a joint project of the California Department of Fish & Game, National Marine Fisheries Service and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, along with partners including the Sonoma County Water Agency – raises coho (using eggs originally taken from wild fish and which are genetically identified and matched) for release back into streams.
- Since the program's first release in 2004 of 6,000 juvenile coho salmon, the program has expanded to **releases of approximately 90,000 juvenile coho salmon in 2009**. With this increase in releases annually, we anticipate a significant increase in the number of returning adult coho salmon in coming years.
- Recent poor ocean conditions have made it extremely challenging for these fish to survive. As a result, only a handful of returning broodstock program adults have been confirmed. For the species to have a chance to recover, it's critical that every coho returning from the ocean has an opportunity to reach its spawning grounds. **Even one coho that is accidentally or purposefully kept by an angler will have a dramatic impact on future populations.**
- Central California Chinook salmon are listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. Video cameras placed in Sonoma County Water Agency fish ladders have captured a low of 1,959 returning Chinook in 2007 and a high of 6,103 (in 2003). **SCWA staff have counted approximately 1,600 Chinook going through the agency fish ladders since early October.**
- Central California Coast steelhead are also listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. Wild steelhead are still widely distributed throughout

the Russian River, however, similar to the salmon, the number of returning adults is much lower than their historic abundance.

- There are two steelhead hatchery programs in the Russian River that provide for recreational fishing. It is legal to catch and keep up to two hatchery-raised steelhead. An estimated 500,000 hatchery-raised steelhead are released into the Russian River watershed every year. The number of returning steelhead range from approximately 1,200 to 13,000 fish annually.
- **It is illegal to keep coho salmon, Chinook salmon and wild steelhead in the Russian River.** Significant state and federal fines will result if anglers keep any of these fish.
- For monitoring purposes, both broodstock coho and hatchery steelhead have clipped adipose fins (the fin on the back of the fish, near the tail). Since both coho and steelhead have adipose fin clips, it has made it increasingly challenging for anglers to correctly distinguish between the two species. This outreach effort is an attempt to address this problem and help educate responsible anglers.
- A key distinguishing feature: Coho and Chinook have black markings in their mouths; steelhead (wild and hatchery) have white/gray mouths.

“If Mouth Has Black, Put It Back”



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