Title

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ROADS, BULL TROUT, AND URBAN ENVIRONMENTS: CHALLENGES FOR ESA CONSULTATIONS ON TRANSPORTATION PROJECTS IN WASHINGTON STATE

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Abstract

The U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) listed the Coastal/Puget Sound Distinct Population Segment (DPS) of bull trout *(Salvelinus confluentus)* as threatened on November 1, 1999, under Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (ESA). The bull trout population in the Washington State region is unique in that it contains the only known anadromous life history form of bull trout. This anadromous life form migrates through, and forages in urbanized river and estuarine shorelines of the Puget Sound.

Since more transportation projects occur in urban versus rural areas, and because seemingly minor activities like routine maintenance can adversely affect bull trout, the number of Section 7 ESA Consultations has significantly increased. Stormwater run-off, increased impervious surface, urban growth and the related increases in capacity demands, overlapping regulatory jurisdictions, the lack of opportunity for minimizing impacts, and difficulty in assessing impacts to a degraded baseline are just a few of the issues that both USFWS and the transportation industry currently struggle with during consultation.

Case-by-case review of these projects under the ESA must mesh the regulatory requirements (time-lines and political pressures) with the biological needs of the endangered species. Current efforts are underway to streamline the regulatory process in Washington State. These efforts include the development of tools such as programmatic biological assessments, providing agencies with liaison personnel, and refining guidance on assessing indirect effects. Tracking the overall impacts to threatened and endangered species (as mandated by ESA) resulting from transportation projects is overwhelming, as adequate tools are still lacking.

While perceived conflicts over the needs of people versus ESA species are not new issues, they are amplified in the urban setting. Incorporation of existing tools—such as transportation demand management, high capacity transit, removal of impervious surface and restoration of hydraulic functions—into transportation planning is likely needed to recover listed species in the urban environment, yet remain to be embraced.

We will draw from our experience conducting Section 7 ESA consultations, participating in long-term transportation planning processes under NEPA, and close coordination with Federal, state, and local transportation agencies to provide a discussion of these challenges and suggestions for overcoming them as we move toward recovery planning efforts for bull trout.