

September/October 2004

# The Adipose



*The Bi-Monthly Newsletter of the Wild Steelhead Coalition*

Volume 4, Issue 3  
Sept./Oct. 2004

## The President's Run

I hope all our members and friends had a great summer and that your vacations and time off lead to great fishing adventures as well as fun with family and friends. I even had the opportunity to "sneak away" between work, WSC and enjoying the family to bring a couple of wild steelhead to hand and I had a great coho break at Neah Bay.

First off, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all who supported the wild steelhead moratorium by writing letters and emails and attending the public testimony in Bremerton on August 28, which was a very packed two hours, loaded with very compelling testimony. Approximately 70 people testified, with a 3:1 ratio in favor of keeping the moratorium intact. By the time you read this we will all know the outcome of the Commission's decision, let's keep our fingers crossed it is the right decision for the fish. One thing I would like to point out, I think many fail to realize, is the two year moratorium is not a means to an end, but rather an opportunity to take a "deep breath" and really understand where we are going in regards to wild steelhead management plans and allow time to develop a more conservation based plan.

Typically, during the summer, the board is able to put a few things on the back burner so we can enjoy the summer, but this summer was indeed very busy. A number of us worked very hard on the WSC second white paper titled "The Status of Wild Steelhead and their Management in Western Washington." The executive summary is included in this issue of the Adipose and we invite you to read it over. The whole document is available for download on the WSC website in the document link. This compelling paper was shared with the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission, submitted to the WDFW for review, delivered to various newspapers and the Port Angeles Chamber of Commerce. This paper includes an overview of the status of wild steelhead stocks on the west coast and Western Washington, including charts utilizing data supplied by the WDFW. It also includes an examination of harvest impacts on the Olympic Peninsula Rivers, considerations for a new harvest policy and recommendations from the Wild Steelhead Coalition. I would like to recognize and thank our VP of Conservation, Dick Burge for heading this project as well as Past President Jack Berryman, VP of Science and Education, Nate Mantua and WSC Member Larry Doyle for all the hard work in developing this important document reviewing the plight of wild steelhead.

At the same time as we were developing the second white paper the WSC Board has been developing a draft of the WSC Steelhead Management Plan to be shared with

WDFW as the WDFW develops their new Steelhead Management Plan after it is fully developed. The WSC management plan will be introduced and shared at the September 8 WSC General Meeting for membership input. If you cannot attend the meeting we will also email it out for review .

The WSC also developed and provided in-depth Comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the Proposed Skagit River Steelhead Rearing and Acclimation Facility. The WSC chief concern with the DEIS is, in fact, its failure to explicitly present clear and convincing evidence that the proposed hatchery acclimation project reflects an effective implementation of main Hatchery Scientific Review Group (HSRG) principals for hatchery reform which include clearly stated goals, scientifically defensible programs and informed decision making. This letter may also be review on the WSC website in the documents link. Special thanks to Nate Mantua, Jeff Johnson and Todd Ripley for their work on this project.

We are also in the midst of planning and organizing our 5<sup>th</sup> Steelhead Summit, now officially called the Steelhead Summit Alliance (SSA) for November 6<sup>th</sup> at the Bellevue Sheraton. Dave Bailey, our Summit Coordinator, has provided information regarding the SSA in this issue and the SSA charter.

One last note, be sure to join us at the WSC Dinner/Fundraiser at the Bellevue Sheraton on October 23 and help support your Coalition. This event will be good time for all who attend. Our VP of Fundraising Peter Dorn will be sending out invitations and information soon. If you have something to donate for the fundraiser please contact Peter at 425-451-3133. We hope you will join us for an evening of “steelhead lies” and many items to bid on to help support the WSC. Thanks and best fishing to all!

*Sincerely,*

*Rich Simms  
President  
Wild Steelhead Coalition*

## **News Update**

Recently the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission voted to rescind the two year moratorium harvesting wild steelhead and instead amended a compromise of 1 wild steelhead per year in 6-3 vote by the Commissioners. You can hear the decision discussion at this link: <http://wdfw.wa.gov/latest.htm>

While this decision may seem very disappointing it is still a step in the right direction. The intentional harvest of wild steelhead was reduced from 5 per year to only 1 fish per year. A lot of energy can be expended analyzing why the Commission choose to move in this direction and it is good to understand the reasons from a lessons learned standpoint. But we should focus and move on, knowing what we do as an organization has impact and can be effective to create change.

Currently the WDFW is tasked to develop a new steelhead management plan. This is a big opportunity for all to communicate with WDFW and the Commission that this plan

should not be "business as usual" and respectively hold them accountable to develop a real, progressive, conservation based steelhead management plan.

The WSC Board is currently developing a draft WSC Steelhead Management Plan to be shared with WDFW as the WDFW develops their new Steelhead Management Plan. The WSC management plan will be introduced and shared at the September 8 WSC General Meeting for membership input and review. I hope you can attend the meeting but if you cannot attend the meeting we will also email it out for review by our membership.

Thanks to all who took time to write letters, emails and attended the testimony on August 28, it really did have an impact! We must move forward and tackle the many issues regarding wild steelhead.

Sincerely,

*Rich Simms*  
*President*  
*Wild Steelhead Coalition*

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## **WSC September 8, 2004 General Meeting**

**Guest Speakers: Dick Burge, WSC VP Conservation**

**Nate Mantua, WSC VP Science & Education**

**Presentation:**

**"The Wild Steelhead Coalition's Draft Management Plan for Washington's Wild Steelhead"**

**Where: Bothell American Legion Hall  
19213 Bothell Way NE, Bothell, WA  
Time 7-9 PM**

**The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife is now in the early stages of a 2 year process of revising our state's steelhead management policies. Over the past few months members of the WSC have been developing our own draft set of recommendations for managing Washington's wild steelhead. This meeting will offer a great opportunity for WSC members to hear about our plan to promote improved steelhead fishing opportunities and better protect wild steelhead in the future. Members and non-members alike are encouraged to attend and contribute ideas to this plan that will be presented to the WDFW steelhead managers later this fall.**

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## WSC Fundraiser and Auction October 23<sup>rd</sup>!

*Please mark your calendar and make a reservation by phone, email or simply print out this invitation and mail in.*

Friends please come join the Wild Steelhead Coalition's Second Annual Fund Raiser. We will be having a fantastic catered dinner with a no host bar this year. Our Raffle and Auction promises to be a fun and exciting. This year's WSC Fund Raiser will be held Saturday evening, October 23, 2004 at the Sheraton Bellevue Hotel, 100 112<sup>th</sup> Ave NE, Bellevue, WA. This will be a grand occasion to meet and enjoy the company of others who share a common concern for the wild steelhead of the great Northwest.

You must make a reservation, as the dinner will be catered. Please prepay with your reservation. However, attendees that prepay by October 5th will participate in an early bird drawing for special gifts. Many truly outstanding items are being offered in the raffle, and live auctions including **guided trips, rods and reels, artwork and/or mounted flies, all the fishing gear** that you could ever want and some new non-fishing items for the family. The donation is only \$35.00 per person.

So, won't you join us? Bring a friend or two. Help support the cause for the native steelhead by making this year's dinner, auction and raffle a big success:

6 PM to 7 PM: WET YOUR WHISTLE/SILENT AUCTION

7 PM to 8 PM: DINNER

8 PM: RAFFLE & AUCTION

- .....
- Yes, I will be attending. Here is my \$35 donation.....  
 Yes, others will be joining us. Each guest is a \$35 donation.....  
 Yes, I have a donation for the auction, call me at .....

Dinner Entrees:

- Stuffed Chicken Breast with spinach, pears, walnuts and brie w/Apple thyme glaze  
 Grilled London Broil w/rosemary demi glaze

**Please indicate number of entrees.**

For information call Peter Dorn;  
VP of Fundraising  
Wild Steelhead Coalition  
425-451-3133

**SEND TO: Wild Steelhead Coalition, 218 MAIN ST. #264 KIRKLAND, WA 98033  
Or Email RSVP to: [dorn440@hotmail.com](mailto:dorn440@hotmail.com)**

## WSC Bylaws Change Notice

At the August WSC Board Meeting the board voted to send notice to membership of the following bylaw changes and term change in the WSC Mission Statement-

### **Proposal for two new board positions :**

Split the current VP Science and Education into two positions, VP of Education and VP of Science. This change will distribute the workload for the VP of Science and Education and help create more focus in two different disciplines. The board will develop the duties and roles after membership votes on the changes and send out to membership for approval. The second change is to reintroduce the VP at Large Position back into the board to help distribute the increasing workload of the organization and work on projects supporting the various board members at direction from the President. Again, we will develop the duties and roles after membership votes on the changes.

### **Term Change in the Mission Statement:**

Change the term in the WSC mission statement from "catch and release" to "wild steelhead release" This change was proposed by the board to keep in line with current management policies of state management guidelines.

## WSC Conservation Award Submissions

The WSC Board is currently **seeking membership submissions** for candidates for The WSC "Conservation Award". This award is presented to an individual or group that, through their actions and/or accomplishments, have made significant and noteworthy contributions to the protection and propagation of wild steelhead. I have included the document in this message for your review. **Please send in or email in your candidate submission by Sept 15th with an explanation of why you believe the candidate is worthy of such recognition.** The WSC will announce the award winner the evening of the WSC Fundraising meeting, Saturday evening, Oct. 23 at the Sheraton Hotel in Bellevue WA. Please see the following award document.

Please do not hesitate to call 425-880-4254 if you have questions or you can simply email the WSC at [wscmembership@yahoo.com](mailto:wscmembership@yahoo.com).

Sincerely,

*Rich Simms*

*President*

*Wild Steelhead Coalition*



## **WSC Conservation Award**

The Wild Steelhead Coalition "Conservation Award" is presented to an individual or group that, through their actions and/or accomplishments, have made significant and noteworthy contributions to the protection and propagation of wild steelhead.

### **General Award Guidelines:**

- The Board of Directors (BOD) will send notice to membership for applicants a couple of months in advanced.
- The award will typically be granted in May and the BOD reserves the right in timing to present the award
- The Award will consist of an award plaque engraved with the WSC Logo, award winners name and WSC President and VP of Conservations names. The award shall not be monetary in nature.
- The award shall not be presented to a WSC board member, but a WSC member can be nominated and receive the award.
- The previous BOD who initiated the award process will finish the work and present the award to the winner.

Approved by BOD 3.25.04

*The following letter was sent to the Port Angeles Chamber of Commerce following a meeting where WSC was invited to provide a presentation to the Chamber regarding the plight of wild steelhead*

August 29, 2004

**Russ Veenema**

President

Port Angeles Chamber of Commerce

121 E. Railroad Ave.

Port Angeles, WA 98362

**Dear Mr Veenema and Chamber Members,**

The Wild Steelhead Coalition would like to thank-you for the opportunity to share the plight of wild steelhead in our state. We appreciate your commitment to provide a "balanced view" of the issues regarding the wild steelhead moratorium at your Chamber of Commerce meeting in Port Angeles on August 16. Thanks so much for coming to the aid of our V.P., **Todd Ripley**, and your willingness to go to such lengths to hear both sides of the story. This action speaks loudly of your great cities desire to look at all sides of an issue before moving forward in your decision making process.

If you have questions regarding wild steelhead issues in the future or would like a WSC presentation in a future meeting please don't hesitate to call at 425-880-4254. Thanks again for your support and dedication to understand the issues regarding the future of wild steelhead in our state

Sincerely,

Richard K. Simms

President

Wild Steelhead Coalition

wscmembership@yahoo.com

[www.wildsteelheadcoalition.com](http://www.wildsteelheadcoalition.com)

cc **Mayor Richard Headrick**

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*The following is the Executive Summary from the WSC's recently completed white paper "Wild Steelhead Status in Western Washington and their Management" This Paper was shared with the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission and WDFW staff. The full paper with charts is available for download on the WSC website in the documents links.*

## **Wild Steelhead Status in Western Washington and their Management Executive Summary**

***"...the status for wild steelhead stocks in Washington State continues to look grim as Washington biologists, fisheries managers and co-managers strive to improve habitat and find a balance between harvest quotas and preserving our native steelhead resource."***

*Amilee Wilson, WDFW, Pacific Coast Steelhead Meeting, March, 2004*

Wild steelhead populations are in the midst of a long-term crisis across most of Washington's waters. Except for a handful of stocks on the Olympic Peninsula and in Southwest Washington rivers, wild steelhead in Washington have been in a prolonged period of serious decline. Today, the majority of Washington's wild steelhead stocks are either listed under the Federal Endangered Species Act (ESA), chronically failing to meet habitat-related escapement goals, or in a period of declining abundance. In the past century the entire Pacific Northwest has witnessed catastrophic declines in wild salmonid populations and productivity due to a combination of degraded freshwater and estuarine habitat, poor hatchery practices, hydropower dams, natural cycle in riverine and ocean carrying capacity, and harvest policies.

In the mid 1950's, over 125 Washington rivers were producing catches of wild steelhead. Recently there have been only 16 to 18 Washington rivers open to wild fish harvest due to ESA listings and low spawner escapements in the unlisted ESUs. In the mid-1950s, 60,000 to 90,000 wild steelhead were annually harvested by Washington sport fishers (numbers based on WDFW data and corrected based on manager's recommendations). In the Skagit Basin alone, annual harvests in the 1950s ranged from 11,000 to 22,000 mostly wild steelhead (Appendix, Table 1). During the 2002/2003 fishing season Washington sport fishers harvested only 3,554 wild steelhead, with the vast majority of that harvest coming from a few river systems on the Olympic Peninsula.

*Maximum Sustained Harvest* (MSH) concepts applied as harvest policies are a prescription for periodic and long term escapement failures and fishery closures. The high harvest rates promoted by MSH management aim to keep spawner numbers low. When harvest-driven low escapements are combined with unrecognized and/or unpredictable natural changes in river and ocean productivity, run-sizes decline and often fail to meet escapement goals, and the health and resilience of steelhead populations are jeopardized. MSH policies meet the management objectives of providing substantial harvest opportunities without compromising stock productivity only during periods of high productivity. Numerous examples from Washington State's rivers have shown us

that when productivity falls, spawner returns and stock health decline and fisheries often close for prolonged periods. An additional serious problem with MSH concepts, as they are applied to Washington's steelhead, is that the data used to develop escapement goals is based on the run-sizes and productivity starting in 1976, unfortunately after the depletion of many stocks was already well underway. As an example, (see Appendix, Table 1), the annual harvest on the Skagit River in the 1950's when spawner escapement was not counted and included as part of the run was generally higher than the total runs (harvest plus wild escapement) in the years after 1976. Contrary to the scientific underpinnings of the MSH concept, many of Washington's rivers with very low wild steelhead spawner populations have failed to rebound and refill the underutilized river habitat. The end result is an unnatural and undesirable poverty for both the people and the ecosystems in these steelhead-poor watersheds.

The Wild Steelhead Coalition (WSC) believes that the MSH policies that have been the rule on Olympic Peninsula rivers since the Boldt Case places the remaining "healthy" stocks at an undue, unnecessary, and unacceptable risk of over fishing and fishing closures. MSH policies consequently put the wild steelhead populations in the Olympic Peninsula rivers at risk of collapse and place Olympic Peninsula steelhead fisheries at risk of closure if (and likely when) productivity declines from the high levels experienced in the recent past. With this probable occurrence, all wild stock fisheries in Washington may be closed to fishing.

Three pillars supporting the health of wild anadromous fish populations are *abundance*, *life history diversity*, and *spatial distribution*. Each of these pillars support the inherent *resilience* of stock productivity. The MSH concept takes direct aim at each of the three pillars of steelhead resilience by specifying harvests that will reduce spawner escapements to about 40% of the level that would theoretically exist in an unfished population. Washington's existing habitat-related stress on our salmonid populations is periodically amplified by natural downturns in productivity related to changes in ocean conditions, regional drought, or extreme flooding and landslide episodes. Layering MSH harvest policies upon the highly degraded habitat and the largely unpredictable changes in ocean and river flow conditions amounts to a management philosophy that errs strongly on the side of providing maximum numbers of wild steelhead for harvest at the risk of seriously depleting spawner abundances. The high harvest rates that come with MSH fisheries weed out the least productive and most heavily fished components of the stock as a whole, thereby reducing the abundance and life history diversity of the stock complex. The reduced abundance and reduced life history diversity lead to a reduced spatial distribution of spawners, and this combination results in a "triple threat" to the long-term health of wild steelhead stocks.

The Wild Steelhead Coalition believes that the time is past due for the co-managers to adopt management approaches that err on the side of protecting wild steelhead abundance and resilience in order to protect and restore the wealth that wild steelhead bring to our watersheds. To that end, the WSC believes that optimizing the balance between providing quality steelhead fishing opportunities and protecting wild steelhead ecosystems begs for a shift away from the MSH policies of the past towards a greater use of Wild Fish Release (WFR) and selective gear regulations. Increasing the use of WFR while reducing harvest seasons will yield immediate economic benefits in the form of maximizing

quality fishing opportunities. At the same time, a shift towards a greater emphasis on WFR policies will yield immediate ecological benefits by vastly reducing fishing impacts on the abundance, life history diversity, and spatial distribution of adult spawner populations. Additional ecological benefits will also come from a greater use of selective gear regulations that will increase the protection for resident rainbow trout, rearing parr, and migrating smolts. Shifting away from MSH policies towards an increased emphasis on WFR and selective gear regulations will also offer significantly better trade-offs in the constant management challenge to optimize the balance between fishing impacts on wild stocks and providing quality fishing opportunities.

Taken together, a shift away from a focus on maximizing the harvest of wild steelhead to a focus on maximizing the wealth that wild steelhead bring to their watersheds is a long term philosophy that promises to benefit the overall health of Washington's wild steelhead. This benefit has already attracted the widespread support of the citizens of Washington State.

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## **Comments on the WDFW Skagit River Steelhead Rearing and Acclimation Facility Draft Environmental Impact Statement**

On July 20, 2004, the **Wild Steelhead Coalition** submitted a 9-page letter with an additional 5 pages of figures commenting on WDFW's Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the proposed *Skagit River Steelhead Rearing and Acclimation Facility*. Skagit steelhead hatchery programs in the past decade have ramped up to increasingly large smolt releases (over 600,000 in 1998, and over 400,000 in every year since), yet adult returns have been abysmal with total hatchery fish harvests ranging from a meager 60 to 455 in the 2000 to 2003 harvest seasons. Smolts have been outplanted at a number of locations that lack adult collection facilities, so the potential for hatchery strays interacting with wild spawners has been high. By any measure, Skagit steelhead hatcheries are in dire need of significant reforms. The proposed project aims to consolidate steelhead hatchery production at a single facility equipped with an adult collection trap and volitional release ponds. Two alternative sites were proposed in the DEIS, one at Grandy Creek and the other on the Baker River.

We chose to review the proposed project from a hatchery reform perspective, and we also commented on the goals and plans for the proposed facility. Based on WDFW's historical smolt release, adult return, and harvest data for both wild and hatchery steelhead, it is abundantly clear that Skagit Basin steelhead hatchery programs are in dire need of major reforms. We requested that any and all hatchery program activities, including the proposed Skagit River steelhead rearing and acclimation facility, should follow the guidelines of science-based hatchery reform. To that end, our comments on the DEIS were explicitly tied to the Hatchery Scientific Review Group's (HSRG's) principles of hatchery reform and area wide recommendations for hatchery reform (HSRG 2004).

As specified by the HSRG, three key principals for hatchery reform are:

- Clearly stated goals,
- scientifically defensible programs, and
- informed decision making.

Our chief concern with the proposed facility as described in the DEIS was, in fact, its failure to explicitly present clear and convincing evidence that the proposed project reflects an effective implementation of the HSRG's hatchery reform principles. In our estimation the proposed activity does not qualify as a science-based hatchery reform project. The HSRG has offered a clear set of *area wide recommendations*, yet the DEIS does not explicitly deal with many of them. Therefore, we requested that a revised EIS contain a new section that evaluates the proposed project in the context of each of the HSRG's area wide recommendations. The DEIS proposal calls for sustained hatchery smolt production of 534,000 fish, yet WDFW data clearly indicate that smolt releases in excess of 400,000 fish in the Skagit Basin have always been followed by exceptionally low wild and hatchery steelhead returns two years later (see the accompanying figure). This facet of the proposed project reflects a distinct lack of informed decision making. The DEIS does not justify how smolt plants in excess of 400,000 fish fits within the context of the Skagit Basin and Skagit Bay ecosystem, does not justify how the proposed releases will emphasize smolt quality over smolt quantity, and does not describe how the proposed project can be justified as part of a regional approach to managing hatchery programs. The DEIS describes a project aimed at goals that are unlikely to be consistently achieved – the proposed management goal for the new facility is to produce 10,000 hatchery steelhead for harvest each season – yet this level of adult steelhead production has never been achieved by Skagit River steelhead hatchery programs in the period since 1976. Each of these points, and others, were discussed in more detail in our comment letter.

The DEIS argues that rearing and acclimation ponds may be critical new infrastructure for reducing smolt residualism rates, increasing smolt-to-adult survival rates, and increasing the fidelity of adult returns to the collection trap thereby reducing stray rates for hatchery spawners, and this may or may not prove to be true. If rearing and acclimation ponds are to be built, we believe that the Grandy Creek site is an especially poor choice due to the required alteration of mainstem river bank, risks of dewatering Grandy Creek, and risks to wild fish of all species that will be posed by intense harvest fisheries that will surely be concentrated in the vicinity of the site. The Baker River site poses fewer fishing impacts risks to wild fish because of its location off the mainstem Skagit, poses fewer negatives with respect to altering active natural riverbank, and it already has extensive infrastructure in place. Due to the differential risks posed by the two sites, we recommend the Baker River site as our preferred alternative.

From the 1950s to the early 1970s the Skagit Basin provided steelhead harvests in line with the goals of the proposed project, yet those harvests were largely composed of wild fish and they proved to be unsustainable. Our comment argued that the spectacular Skagit River steelhead runs of a few decades past should serve as restoration targets for today's long-range planning. We also stated that new hatchery projects in the Skagit Basin should be part of long-term efforts to restore the Skagit's once magnificent wild steelhead runs. History shows us that a management focus on harvest has never served the long-term interests of Skagit River steelhead fisheries. We requested that additional alternatives with additional management goals should have been included in this DEIS. For example, a significant reduction or even complete elimination of steelhead hatchery plants coupled with a reprogramming of this project's funds for habitat restoration and protection should also be evaluated as a means of improving steelhead fisheries in the Skagit Basin. This alternative would, however, require a shift in the stated goals away from increasing harvest opportunities for hatchery fish, and that is a shift in priorities that we supported.

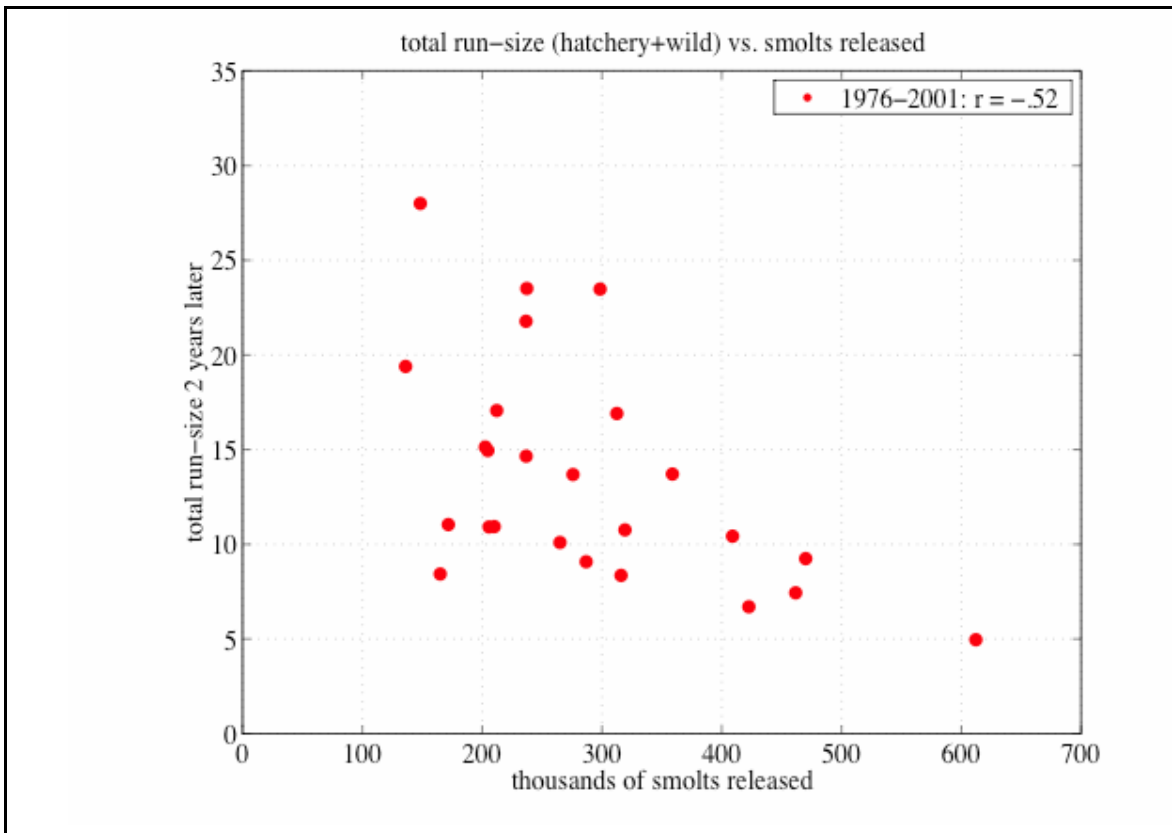
A copy of our comment letter is available for download off the Wild Steelhead Coalition web-site by clicking on the "Documents" link: <http://www.wildsteelheadcoalition.com>

The Draft EIS can be downloaded from the WDFW web-site:

<http://wdfw.wa.gov/do/jun04/jun1404a.htm>

And the Hatchery Scientific Reform Group's reports are available online at:

[http://www.ltk.org/HRP\\_Publications.html](http://www.ltk.org/HRP_Publications.html)



Comparison of annual total steelhead run-size versus annual smolt releases for the Skagit Basin. Run-size data are offset by 2 years to focus on the typical ocean-age of returning adults. Red dots are for smolt plants from 1976-2001 and run-sizes from 1978-2003; "r" value in the legend is the correlation coefficient for the data points shown. The correlation between these records is -.52 indicating a strong negative association.

Data provided by Bill McMillan and Washington Trout.

***Nate Mantua***

***WSC VP Science/Education***

***Email: [natemantua@netscape.net](mailto:natemantua@netscape.net)***

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## Thanks for Supporting Wild Steelhead!

*The Wild Steelhead Coalition (WSC) is an organization dedicated to increasing the return of wild steelhead to the waters and rivers of the Pacific Northwest.*

**Wild Steelhead Coalition**  
**218 Main St. Box 264**  
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