

SELECT THE GRAYS & CHINOOK RIVERS AS WASHINGTON'S NEXT WILD STEELHEAD GENE BANK



Attend the Public Comment Meeting on the next Gene Bank in Southwest Washington

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) is holding a public meeting from 6 – 8 PM on January 21, 2016 in Cathlamet, WA at the Wahkiakum County's River Street Meeting Room (25 River Street, Cathlamet, WA 98612) to discuss the two options for the state's next Wild Steelhead Gene Bank. They will be accepting public comments at the meeting and taking written comment starting January 25th.

WDFW is in the process of establishing a Wild Steelhead Gene Bank in rivers near the mouth of the Columbia River.

Wild Steelhead Gene Banks are part of an effort by WDFW to minimize the impacts of their steelhead hatchery programs on select wild steelhead populations across the state.

What rivers are eligible?

WDFW is currently considering eliminating hatchery steelhead releases for two distinct groups of rivers in Southwest Washington. A Gene Bank designation will be established on either the Grays and Chinook rivers, or Mill, Abernathy, and Germany creeks. The Grays and Chinook rivers are one distinct steelhead population, and the Mill, Abernathy, and Germany creeks are considered a separate distinct population.

Why select the Grays and Chinook rivers as the next Wild Steelhead Gene Bank?

The Grays and Chinook rivers are the best candidates for the next Wild Steelhead Gene Bank because they are strong wild steelhead populations that have met or exceeded escapement goals for the last 15 years, they are likely to maintain high productivity into the future.

On Abernathy Creek, a multi-year US Fish and Wildlife research study is currently being conducted to understand more about the risks from the impacts of integrated (broodstock) hatchery programs on wild steelhead populations. This research is critical to understanding more about the genetic causes of hatchery domestication and will help improve hatchery practices by minimizing risks to wild steelhead across the Northwest. Establishing Mill, Abernathy and Germany creeks as a Wild Steelhead Gene Bank would interfere with this ongoing research and be counterproductive for hatchery reform goals.

The majority of stakeholders who participated in a yearlong advisory group lead by WDFW voted in favor of the Grays and Chinook rivers as becoming the next Wild Steelhead Gene Bank.

More information will be available on the Advisory Group website:

Photo: Russ Ricketts http://wdfw.wa.gov/conservation/fisheries/steelhead/gene_bank/columbia_river/Wild_Steelhead



Questions about Wild Steelhead Gene Banks

Established: Sol Duc, Wind, East Fork Lewis, Green, North Fork Toutle

Recommended: Grays & Chinook, Skagit, Puyallup, Elwha

What is a Wild Steelhead Gene Bank?

Wild Steelhead Gene Banks, also known as Wild Stock Gene Banks and Wild Steelhead Management Zones, are areas within each steelhead Distinct Population Segment where wild steelhead are largely protected from the effects of hatchery plants.

What happens when a river gets selected as a Wild Steelhead Gene Bank?

No releases of hatchery steelhead will occur in those streams where spawning occurs or rearing takes place, and fisheries can be conducted in these areas if wild steelhead management objectives and Endangered Species Act regulations are met. Monitoring and evaluation programs will help fish managers understand more about how the elimination of hatchery programs benefits wild populations.

Can I still sportfish for steelhead if it is selected as a Gene Bank?

Yes. Sportfishing is still allowed on Gene Bank Rivers as long as populations can support angling pressure, although anglers will have to release all wild steelhead unharmed. In some situations, the department may place restrictions on tackle requirements and seasons to help conserve populations. No populations in this group are currently listed under the Endangered Species Act.

Does a Gene Bank designation eliminate all harvest opportunities in the region?

No. Sport anglers will still have hatchery steelhead and chinook harvest opportunities in neighboring rivers that will continue to receive hatchery plants.

Why establish Wild Steelhead Gene Banks now?

In 2000, Washington's state hatchery programs underwent a congressional review by the independent Hatchery Scientific Review Group to recommend hatchery reform measures. As a result, in 2008 WDFW adopted the Statewide Steelhead Management Plan, which provided a framework for policies, strategies, and actions to accelerate the recovery of wild steelhead and support sustainable fisheries. Wild Steelhead Gene Banks are now being implemented to fulfill the requirements under the Statewide Steelhead Management Plan, and the Sol Duc, Wind, East Fork Lewis, and North Fork Toutle/Green rivers are already Gene Banks.

Will establishing Wild Steelhead Gene Banks help protect and recover wild steelhead?

Yes. Research has shown that hatchery fish are less genetically diverse and can negatively impact wild populations through competition for food and habitat. Making improvements in hatchery practices today will minimize these risks and ensure that we have healthy and productive wild populations into the future.

Photo: Russ Ricketts
Bright Side

More information will be available on the Advisory Group website:
http://wdfw.wa.gov/conservation/fisheries/steelhead/gene_bank/columbia_river/