

Department of the Interior
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
California/Nevada Operations Office
2800 Cottage Way, Room W-2606
Sacramento, CA. 95825
Phone: 916/414-6464
Fax: 916/414-6486
<http://sacramento.fws.gov>

News Release



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Contact: Curt Mullis (Klamath Falls) 541-885-8481
Al Donner (Sacramento) 916-414-6566

FWS TO CONDUCT COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW OF KLAMATH SUCKER POPULATIONS

Service finds that delisting petition does not contain substantial new information

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced today that it will conduct an extensive review of two rare fish in the Upper Klamath Basin that currently have federal protection as endangered species, the Lost River sucker and the shortnose sucker. The announcement was made at the same time that the Service concluded that the two fish should remain protected by the Endangered Species Act during the review, saying that a petition to delist the two species does not provide substantial new information to warrant delisting.

The Service believes the study, known as a five-year review under the ESA, will be a valuable management activity. It will help the Service, other agencies and Basin stakeholders to understand more precisely the condition of the two species, assess the impact of actions now underway to help the species, and determine what is needed to assure their recovery.

“Populations of the Klamath suckers declined significantly in the last decade,” said Steve Thompson, manager of the Service’s California/Nevada Operations Office. “But potentially important restoration measures are under way that create optimism that the Klamath suckers can be restored to good health.”

For the second time in two years, the Service has found that a petition filed by the Interactive Citizens United does not contain substantial scientific information to warrant removing the Los River sucker and the shortnose sucker from the Federal list of threatened and endangered species. The two sucker species have been federally listed as endangered since 1988.

The petition was submitted in September 12, 2001, by Richard A. Gierak, representing Interactive Citizens United. On May 12, 2002 the Service published a finding that the delisting petition did not present substantial information. This finding was challenged by the petitioners, and on September 3, 2003 the Federal District Court remanded the finding and ordered the Service to either reissue the initial finding with additional explanations or to do a status review. The Service has extensively reviewed the information provided in the petition, clarified the finding, and concluded that it should conduct a broader review.

The two species occur naturally only in the Upper Klamath Basin. Both species live in lakes and reservoirs most of the year and migrate upstream in the spring to spawn. The Lost River sucker, can reach 39

inches long and can live at least 45 years. The shortnose sucker can reach 20 inches in length and live as long as 33 years.

Sucker populations increased in the early 1990s, then decreased significantly again due to a series of fish die-offs from 1995-97, indicating that the population remains at risk. Other factors, including poor water quality, compound the problems of the species.

Presently, important cooperative restoration efforts are under way that could help the two species, including habitat restoration, fish screen installation and other activities in the Klamath Basin. The Service is a cooperative partner in federally-funded efforts to improve the status of the two species while maintaining the other important community interests throughout the Basin.

The Department of Interior (DOI) has committed funding to the Klamath basin, much of which is aimed specifically at helping restoring the sucker population. The proposed FY 2005 budget submitted to Congress in January recommends significant increases in federal spending directly related to the suckers, including a \$5.9 million increase in Service partnerships with other parties to restore Klamath fish habitat, \$4.6 million to purchase critical Klamath lands and restore it to wetlands that helps the suckers, \$2.5 for new studies of the suckers, and \$2.1 million more to remove Chiloquin Dam and reopen 70 miles of sucker habitat on the Sprague River.

“The Service is determined to restore the Klamath sucker population to a viable condition, while meeting the needs of the tribes that rely on the sucker for important cultural benefits and on the local economy,” said Thompson. “The Service is open to all information and proposals for cooperative efforts to assist the species in the Klamath Basin.”

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The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 544 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 63 Fish and Wildlife Management offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.