

## “Steelhead” Issues Overview

Rainbow trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) occur in most major coastal streams in Santa Barbara County. Typically, a significant portion of the population migrates to the ocean, returning after 2 to 4 years to spawn; this form is known as “steelhead” and normally returns during high flows in the winter or early spring. Some proportions of *O. mykiss* populations, including those that are landlocked, have adopted a freshwater-resident life pattern and do not need to migrate to the ocean to complete their life cycle. Historically large numbers of both sea-run and landlocked forms have supported a popular sport fishery. During the last 60 years factors such as loss of habitat and in-stream structures (migration barriers) reduced native steelhead populations.

In August 1997, National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS or NOAA Fisheries) designated steelhead in Santa Barbara County as an endangered species (pursuant to the Endangered Species Act, ESA) as part of the southern California steelhead Evolutionarily Significant Unit (ESU). The listing included any populations in the Santa Maria/Sisquoc River, lower Santa Ynez River and South-coast Streams from Jalama Creek to Rincon Creek below “significant” barriers to upstream migration (such as Bradbury Dam). Some members of the community have welcomed formal protection of steelhead since they regard steelhead as an important indicator of the health of local streams. Others regard listing of steelhead as a threat to ongoing activities on private property and to delivery of certain public services.

In fact, the long term ESA listing is intended to increase fish populations to a level where protection would no longer be necessary, but for the foreseeable future regulatory issues may affect both delivery of public services and activities on private property. In particular, additional permitting and permit requirements may add substantially to the cost of ongoing activities and new projects. In addition, the ESA process for steelhead is ongoing; NOAA is both developing a “Recovery Plan” and is attempting to more specifically designate areas as “critical” to recovery of the species. Since much of the County is currently included in the listing, the eventual NOAA Fisheries listing of specific streams as “critical habitat” could refocus regulatory requirements away from those watersheds (such as San Antonio Creek) with no history of steelhead.

In order to comply with steelhead related regulations in a constructive manner, and to influence the actual implementation of these requirements, a number of local agencies have led efforts to improve habitat conditions and take other actions to expand steelhead populations. These agencies believe, in balance, that to do so best serves the interest of their constituents. For example, under the direction of the State Water Resources Control Board, the agencies comprising the Cachuma Member Units have taken the lead in developing the Lower Santa Ynez Fish Management Plan and, as directed by NOAA, implementing the plan’s migration barrier removal and habitat enhancements with minimal direct impact to water supplies.

From the perspective of fish habitat enhancement and fish population increase, addressing issues including migration barrier modification/removal, stream-bank stabilization, and non-native vegetation removal are seen by regulatory agencies as critical. But to protect public health and safety, it is essential to guarantee water supply, provide for channel maintenance and bank stabilization, as well as assure maintenance and replacement of built infrastructure (like bridges). The past focus of regulatory issues/constraints has been limited to stream-corridors because they contain key habitat types for passage, spawning, rearing etc. More recently, some regulatory

agencies have begun to consider riparian zones integral to protecting habitat values such as water quality and temperature. Watersheds, as connected areas which can affect water quality, have been less scrutinized by regulatory agencies, but that could change if regulators come to view watersheds as a necessary context for developing steelhead protection measures.

A number of County delivered services have been or may be constrained by the listing of steelhead. Examples include:

1. Channel maintenance for Flood Control,
2. Facilities repair (bridges, grade control structures),
3. Facilities up-grades (stream crossings), and
4. Cachuma Park modification (higher lake level to increase water for fish releases).

Regulatory agencies believe any activities in a stream channel or “riparian zone” may adversely affect fish. Thus for those activities which are allowed, substantial mitigation, including restrictions on timing and nature of activities, are required. Sometimes modifications are required to other facilities to cause sufficient mitigation to address impacts of an uncertain, but potentially substantial, nature. Other environmental constraints (nesting birds, frogs, turtles) may result in activities being restricted to specific and very short periods of time. Both the County Flood Control District and County Roads Division have faced these challenges in their design/permitting/construction of new facilities and in maintaining existing facilities/conditions in and near creeks.

In the same way that listing of steelhead has made permitting projects in and near creeks more difficult for public agencies, private landowners needing state and/or federal permits for projects face new hurdles. Examples include construction or repair of road crossings, bank erosion control or stabilization work, and control of non-native vegetation. As a result, the County has initiated streamlining proposals for State and Federal permits to assist both local agencies and landowners with their projects. In addition, the County has collaborated with landowners in design and permitting of several bank stabilization and dry weather crossing modification projects, some of which address safety issues as well.

As shown on Table 1, the County has become directly involved in several fish related initiatives to influence permitting and design requirements for new projects and ongoing maintenance of existing facilities. These include:

1. Memorandum of Understanding to implement the Lower Santa Ynez Fish Management Plan
2. Memorandum of Understanding to establish and participate in the Tri-Counties Fish Team
3. Grant to evaluate, prioritize and permit south-coast barrier modification/removal projects
4. Inclusion of fish related projects in the Flood Control Routine Annual Maintenance Plan (to assist other agencies and individuals with permitting)

While community involvement has defined the County’s role, resources have come from grants.

Revenues provided to the community through State grants have paid for most fish related activities (including facilities modifications). This approach benefits local agencies and landowners while minimizing direct costs to local taxpayers. Authorization for these grants was sought through formal action by the Board of Supervisors. A summary of previously adopted Board actions and upcoming action items, including current grant supported activities, is provided in the attached table. Most current County staff activities are supported by grants.

**Fish (Steelhead) Studies and Projects  
Summary of Current County Involvement**

**TABLE 1**

<b>Date of Board Action</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Approved Tasks</b>	<b>Tasks Completed</b>	<b>Tasks Remaining</b>
2/20/01	The Board of Supervisors approved and authorized the Chair to execute the 2001 "Memorandum of Understanding to Support Implementation of the National Marine Fisheries Service Biological Opinion and the Santa Ynez River Technical Advisory committee Lower Santa Ynez River Fish Management Plan"	Recommendation to Board of expenditure of \$100,000 for fish related work pursuant to contracts with Cachuma Member Units (water purveyors)	Tasks associated with flow monitoring and fish studies in cooperation with CCRB	Annual recommendation to Board as part of Water Agency Budget
06/26/01	Board approved the Water Agency's participation in "Memorandum of Understanding for Implementation of the Lower Santa Ynez Fish Management Plan", and authorized the Chair to execute.	Removal of Quiota Creek barriers in coordination with CCRB efforts, find grant funding, conduct feasibility studies.	Grant funding applied for 5/12/04 and awarded in 6/2005 for feasibility study.	Resolution coming to the BOS summer 2005 to accept grant for feasibility study
2/26/02	Board approved the Water Agency's participation in "Memorandum of Understanding among the cooperative members of the Tri-County F.I.S.H. Team for the attainment of federal and state funding for the recovery of Pacific Coast salmon and steelhead" (Exhibit A), and authorized the Chair to execute.	Direct Water Agency Manager to participate in FISH Team activities, serve on Executive Committee.	No specific tasks, but continued participation	No specific tasks, but continued participation
7/08/03	Board concurred with the application to the California Department of Fish and Game for the Tri-County F.I.S.H. Team for the administration of the Tri-County F.I.S.H. Team Activities (\$100,000).	Water Agency staff to oversee the FISH Team – prepare reports, grant applications, coordinate meetings and enter into contracts with consultants.	Funding accepted 06/01/04 – task details outlined below.	
10/14/03	Board concurred with the application to the California Coastal Conservancy to provide funds to the County Water Agency for \$453,000 for planning, design, and permitting of a select number of fish passage improvement projects on the South Coast of Santa Barbara County.	Water Agency to oversee Fish Passage Project Development Program, coordinate meetings, lead project selection process, enter into contracts with consultant for planning, design and permitting of privately owned properties, Flood design staff to complete county owned barrier design, conduct or coordinate landowner outreach with members of the technical advisory team.	Funding accepted 12/02/04 – task details outlined below.	

Date of Board Action	Action	Approved Tasks	Tasks Completed	Tasks Remaining
12/02/03	<p>A. Board adopted a Resolution to accept the terms and conditions of the Grant Agreement with the California Coastal Conservancy to receive grant funding for the <i>Santa Barbara County Fish Passage Project Development Program</i>; and</p> <p>B. Board authorized the Public Works Director to enter into a Grant Agreement and all other subsequent agreements or amendments to receive up to \$453,000 in funding for the <i>Santa Barbara County Fish Passage Project Development Program</i>.</p>	Water Agency to oversee Fish Passage Project Development Program, coordinate meetings, lead project selection process, enter into contracts with consultant for planning, design and permitting of privately owned properties, Flood design staff to complete county owned barrier design, conduct or coordinate landowner outreach with members of the technical advisory team, apply for construction funding for county-owned facility retrofits.	Water Agency has coordinated meetings, led project selection process, and has entered into a contract with Questa Engineering (see entry for 3/15/2005) for planning, design and permitting of privately owned properties, Flood design staff is working on a design for Gobernador Debris Basin Fish Passage retrofit, Water Agency staff applied for construction funding for Gobernador Debris Basin retrofits (awarded 3/2005).	Prepare a PO for the feasibility study on lower Montecito Creek and conduct or coordinate landowner outreach with members of the technical advisory team (maybe county staff, CEC or consultant as directed by BOS).
2/10/04 Revised 4/05/05	Board approved MOU regarding the surcharge of Lake Cachuma and the protection of recreational resources at the Lake. Board approved revision to accommodate increasing the initial level of surcharge without harming Park facilities.	County to seek funding for and modify facilities within 5 years necessary to allow 3 foot surcharge of Lake Cachuma to increase water available for fish releases downstream. Water districts to accept limit of surcharge to 1.5 ft. (revised to 2.49 ft) for 5 years.	Interim modification of Boat ramp, Interim protection of water treatment plant, design of permanent facilities modification	Secure full funding for permanent facilities modifications.
06/01/04	<p>A. Board adopted a Resolution to accept the grant funding with the California Department of Fish and Game to receive grant funding for the Tri-County F.I.S.H Team; and</p> <p>B. Board authorized the Public Works Director to enter into the Grant Agreement and modifications or amendments to receive up to \$68,500 in funding for the Tri-County F.I.S.H Team.</p>	Water Agency staff to oversee the FISH Team – prepare reports, grant applications, coordinate meetings and enter into contracts with consultants for workshops, BMP development and permit streamlining.	Completed ½ of meeting coordination, contract with consultant approved (12/15/04 – see below), workshops completed	Prepare grant proposal (resolution approved by BOS on 4/26/05)

Date of Board Action	Action	Approved Tasks	Tasks Completed	Tasks Remaining
12/15/04	Board approved contract with Questa Engineering for TCFT work	Workshops, BMP Development, Permit Streamlining	Workshops	BMP development and Permit Streamlining
3/15/05	Board approved a contract with Questa Engineering Corporation of Point Richard, California for design services for the planning, design and permitting of fish passage barrier modification projects along various creeks along the South Coast of Santa Barbara County through June 30, 2006 in the amount not to exceed \$129,580.23.	Conduct planning, design and permitting of privately owned properties as part of the Santa Barbara County Fish Passage Project Development Program	Completed planning effort with stakeholder group	Design and permitting of projects approved by landowner, (landowner outreach as directed by BOS)
<b>Potential future actions</b>				
Summer 2005	Board may be asked to accept funding for Gobernador Debris Basin Fish Passage Retrofit project construction, TCFT 2005/2006 Activities – which were all approved for grant funding from the Department of Fish and Game in 3/2005. Staff is waiting on DFG to provide contract information.			