

The Florence STEP program has 110 members who have already logged over 5,000 volunteer hours this year in support of ODFW. Most of these hours are spent operating the hatchery Steelhead program in the Siuslaw basin. We install and maintain 2 traps, capture brood stock, live spawn the fish, incubate the eggs in our STEP hatchery, then send them to an ODFW hatchery in the Willamette Valley where they are raised to smolt size. The smolts are released back at our trap locations where they migrate out to sea, returning in great numbers to allow a robust fishery and provide brood stock to continue our program.

The proposed Coastal Multispecies Conservation and Management Plan is proposing to halt the placement of our hatchery Steelhead into Lake Creek at our Green Creek trap location and open Lake Creek to a one a day wild fish limit. We feel this will push the few wild fish that are left to the brink of extinction and greatly reduce the number of anglers that presently come to this area. Our proposal to continue to operate this trap and to build and operate a new trap higher in the Lake creek system was rejected. This plan would have opened 20 miles of Lake Creek to excellent Steelhead fishing, increasing angling opportunities and fishing license sales. Florence STEP does not approve of the ODFW proposal or the process used to come up with it.

We are the people in the field operating the Steelhead program. We were not asked our opinions by ODFW before the plan came out. When the plan came out ODFW chose a person who was no longer a STEP member and was totally unaware of our Steelhead program to be our area stakeholder. ODFW has gone out of its way to exclude the Florence STEP Program's input into the process.

Since I became aware of the plan I have contacted the ODFW director Roy Elicker and our district biologist, Bob Buckman. Our board has met with Bob Buckman to discuss his reason for closing Lake Creek to Hatchery releases. He told us that He had no intention of making any changes to the plan as it is presented. Apparently there is a feeling at ODFW that hatchery fish are inferior or bad for our streams. Given the fact that there are no pure wild fish in our streams any more and that the Siuslaw basin is not a good basin for wild Steelhead production. Adding hatchery smolts to allow for a strong fishery makes good sense. Mr. Buckman does not agree with our assessment.

A meeting of local citizens and business owners brought out 150 people to a meeting in Mapleton. Mr. Buckman was asked to explain why he had proposed to end the hatchery fishery in Lake Creek. His answer to the question was a proposal to make multiple hatchery releases at non trap sites into the Siuslaw River to help spread the returning fish throughout the river. This proposal does nothing to help the businesses and guides on

Lake Creek. In the past the releasing smolts at non trap sites where they would mix with wild fish had always been against ODFW policy...

There were two Members of the Oregon legislature present at the Mapleton meeting. I am sure they will ask the ODFW Director why they are dislodging fishing opportunities and license sales by closing existing fishery for the sake of a wild fish policy. The Florence Step program is hoping someone listens to our plea. We would be happy to just leave the fishery the way it is.

At our May STEP meeting we had a representative of CCA (Costal Conservation Association) talks to us about starting a CCA Chapter in Florence. After the meeting, I had several club members come to me and suggest that we dissolve the STEP club and start a CCA Chapter. I really don't want to end our very successful STEP Program. A little give and take from ODFW would be very helpful to dismiss this idea.

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