

Local Fish Hatchery Shutdown Hearing At Issaquah Hatchery

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by Dallas Cross

The Department announced two public hearings to get input about proposed changes amounting to a virtual shutdown of operations at the Tokul Creek trout and steelhead hatchery near Snoqualmie Falls. The last hearing for public comment will be held at the Issaquah Fish Hatchery on Thursday, September 11, lasting from 6 to 8 pm.

The Issaquah hatchery, having only two full time staff, now regularly depends on the services of current Tokul Creek staff, along with the services of volunteers, for its routine operations. Furthermore, there are proposed shifts in regional hatchery functions associated with the loss of Tokul Creek production that may impact the ability of the Issaquah Creek hatchery to operate, and to meet special needs such as the harvesting and incubation of Kokanee Salmon eggs to restore this threatened species in Lake Sammamish.

The impact on the Issaquah Hatchery was not discussed in the impact statement issued on the web by the Washington Department of Fish and Wild Life.

In the Department's announcement they state that the purpose of the change in the function of the Tokul Creek hatchery was to increase naturally spawning steelhead trout to meet Federal requirements of the Endangered Species Act. The overall goal is stated as to eventually designate the Snoqualmie watershed as a "wild steelhead management zone."

The plan proposes a trade off of hatchery spawned steelhead trout for naturally spawning, wild steelhead. Some recreational authorities state that because of different spawning times the two species do not seriously compete with each other.

The proposed changes will drastically reduce, if not eliminate, steelhead plants in the Snoqualmie River system and relocate trout production for lake stocking to other facilities.

The reality, casually alluded to in the announcement, is that Washington State funding for hunting and fishing recreation has been again cut and the current state budget requires cutbacks in spending. Millions of dollars are returned to the state from a Federal ten percent tax on sporting goods but they now go into the state's general fund and are not earmarked for hunting and fishing recreation support.

Insofar as the proposed "change" in the function of the Tokul Creek hatchery will have significant impact on local recreational fishing, species conservation, and may affect Issaquah commerce that depends on income from recreation and salmon hatchery tourism, it is in the best interest of Issaquah community members to attend the hearing, get the facts and voice their support or concerns.