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News Release



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Fish and Wildlife Service Determines Lake Sammamish Kokanee Doesn't Qualify for ESA Protection

After evaluating current available scientific information, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has determined that Lake Sammamish kokanee salmon do not meet the criteria of a distinct population segment and therefore, are not a listable entity under the Endangered Species Act (Act).

The determination comes in response to a 2007 petition from a group of conservation organizations and local and tribal governments concerned about the decline of the kokanee population. In 2008, the Service published a notice in the Federal Register indicating the petition provided substantial information that listing the population might be warranted pending further investigation through a status review. That review, now complete, indicates the Lake Sammamish kokanee does not meet the definitions of a listable entity under the agency's Distinct Population Segment Policy.

“Although this population does not qualify as a listable entity, we remain concerned about its conservation status in light of the extinction of the summer and fall kokanee populations in Lake Sammamish,” said Ken Berg, Manager of the Service's Washington Fish and Wildlife Office Pacific Region. “We fully support conserving this kokanee population as a component of the native biodiversity of the Lake Sammamish ecosystem. We have demonstrated this through our ongoing technical and financial support of the collaborative propagation efforts for the late-run kokanee with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife and King County, as well as our collaborative efforts in ongoing habitat restoration and research efforts for this population.”

Berg also said the Service is interested in gathering further information regarding the species.

“We ask the public to continue to submit to us any new information that becomes available concerning the taxonomy, biology, and status of the Lake Sammamish kokanee, and to help us support continued cooperative efforts for this population,” Berg said.

Kokanee are the land-locked version of ocean-going sockeye salmon (*Onchorynchus nerka*) and are considered the same species. The kokanee in Lake Sammamish evolved from sockeye that entered the lake from the ocean and remained to form a resident population that developed into a permanent kokanee population. Kokanee do not return to the ocean but spawn in streams entering the lake where they live or along the shores of the lake. Native to lands bordering the northern Pacific Ocean, kokanee have been widely

introduced to lakes across North America to provide sport fishing opportunities. Although kokanee are salmon, a species normally under the jurisdiction of the NOAA Fisheries, the Service has jurisdiction over fish species that spend most of their lives in freshwater. Because kokanee spend their entire lives in fresh water, they have been determined to be the responsibility of the Service.

Under the Service's Distinct Population Segment (DPS) policy, three elements are considered in the decision regarding establishment of a population as a possible DPS. These elements are: the discreteness of a population segment in relation to the remainder of the species to which it belongs; the significance of the population to the species to which it belongs; and the population segment's conservation status in relation to the ESA's standards for listing, delisting or reclassification. Although Lake Sammamish kokanee were found to be discrete from other *O. nerka* populations, biologists found no evidence the population has a special significance to the well-being of the species throughout its range and therefore, does not qualify as a DPS under the Service's 1996 DPS policy. Because it does not qualify as a DPS, the population is not a listable entity under the ESA.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals, and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov. Connect with our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/usfws, follow our tweets at www.twitter.com/usfwshq, watch our YouTube Channel at <http://www.youtube.com/usfws> and download photos from our Flickr page at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/usfwshq>