

Cutting New Paths

With another summer just around the corner—a summer of hot homewaters and low instream flows—anglers need to get creative in order to stay connected. Sometimes the solution is as simple as keeping a thermometer handy while you're fishing and quitting when it's too hot. And sometimes, it means cutting new paths of connection with your Pacific Northwest homewaters.

Take up river snorkeling...

There are very few homes that don't have a mask and snorkel stashed somewhere. Dig them out, throw them in a bag, and go explore your homewaters. Seeing a stream from a native fish's perspective is a peculiar and delightful thing. Some people try it and never go back to fishing. But no one—literally, no one—has ever said 'Meh' to river snorkeling. As with fishing, tread lightly. You're in their world now.

Leave the rod, take the notebook...

Hike your local watershed. Then map it, sketch it, paint it. Write about it. Sing about it. Whatever! Just log the things you see. Put down what matters to you. You'll be amazed how much territory you can cover when you set out to record the goings-on in your homewaters.

Thank a decision maker...

Disappointing as fishing closures are, they're the best thing for wild fish when water temperatures spike, flows plummet, or runs crash. Someone had to make that call. And it probably wasn't easy. Check in with those decision makers. At best, their job is a thankless one. At worst, they're lambasted for having the guts to make a tough decision. Get together with other wild fish advocates and start a positive campaign. Let them know you support them when they put wild fish first.

Make a connection...

Prior to colonization, native fish flourished under the stewardship of Indigenous peoples. Brush up on their history. Pacific Northwest tribes have ancient, unbroken connections to the watersheds that you care about. And ancient ways of keeping those watersheds healthy. Ask if you can get involved in their work. Ask what you can do to help.

Ad-vo-cate!

Maybe you're already doing this. Now is the time to double down on your advocacy. The wild fish of the Pacific Northwest need us now, more than ever. Do you have a homewaters that needs protecting? Sign on as an NFS River Steward or join your local NFS River Steward Chapter and let us support your work! Do you have a special skill that you want to use on behalf of wild fish? Become a Native Fish Fellow! Some of our Fellows are fisheries biologists. And others are filmmakers, writers, artists, and designers. It takes all types to build an effective movement. We want

to know what you can do for the watersheds and wild fish of the Pacific Northwest!

Go fishing...

...for non-native fish! We know, we know—a smallmouth doesn't hold a candle to a steelhead. But targeting invasive species, removing them from Pacific Northwest waterways, and coming up with clever ways to cook them will give wild, native fish a much-needed break. In more ways than one.

A Threat At Every Stage

Climate change threatens the native fish of the Pacific Northwest at every stage of their life cycle. Warming water temperatures make it harder to survive and reproduce. Sparse rainfall and dwindling snowpack reduce instream flows. And altered flows can change the timing of migration and spawning. Flows may even be reduced to the point that streams become a disconnected series of pools.

To protect native fish in the face of a changing climate, we're pressing Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife to:

01. Develop policies for flow- and temperature-based closures, adopt selective gear

regulations, and protect cold water refugia.

02. Adopt policies that advantage native fish, rather than invasive species.

03. Strategically adapt fisheries management when ocean conditions are poor.

04. Reform hatchery releases in light of the best available climate and fisheries science.

As an organization we've been working to:

01. Build partnerships with climate change advocates in North America and around the world.

02. Champion climate change policies that uplift communities of color.

03. Form a working group for NFS River Stewards and Native Fish Fellows to promote our policy priorities and identify ways to expand with climate change work for native fish.

To learn more about our climate work, check on the NFS Hot Homewaters Campaign, or visit nativefishsociety.org/science/heat.

If you are interested in joining the working group for NFS River Stewards and Native Fish Fellows, email NFS Regional Coordinator Liz Perkin at liz@nativefishsociety.org!



The Meat-and-Potatoes Guide to Public Testimony

Crafting an effective public testimony is a critical skill for grassroots advocates. But it can be hard to know where to start. That's why we put together simple, straightforward guide to help you through the process.

THE MEAT

01. Address the group and its individual members.

Make it formal. Wild fish advocates are a laid back bunch. The same cannot be said for legislative bodies.

02. Introduce yourself and your association with the issue.

Whether you're speaking as an activist, a professional, or a community member, your testimony will be more effective if you make it personal.

03. Don't assume they know what the problem is—tell them!

Statistics and facts are useful, but the heart of the matter should have a little heart.

04. Tell them what's causing the problem.

Be passionate, be persistent, be personal—yes! But be cool. You won't win anyone over with a lot of hootin' and hollerin'.

05. Tell them how they can fix the problem.

And what they'll get if they do! Behind Door #1: Abundant wild fish, clean water, and healthy watersheds. But Door #2 . . .

06. Thank them for their time.

We've tried this a number of ways—songs, poems, baked goods. Now we stick with: "Thank you." If we're feeling fancy, maybe: "Thank you for your time." Comes out great every time.

THE POTATOES

01. Practice really does make perfect.

With a friend. In a mirror. Gazing woefully into the empty sockets of a human skull which rests on your palm (Hey, it worked for Hamlet). But practice.

02. Cut the tricky words.

Does 'oncorhynchus' fight you like a foul-hooked flounder? Does 'anadromous' come out 'andromeda' every time? May we suggest steelhead? And sea-run? The clock is ticking. And you're not there to discuss the fate of the galaxy.

03. Slow down!

Public Speaking 101: Set a steady pace. And remember to breathe.

04. Keep it simple.

In fact, if someone already made your point, don't be afraid to stand up, tell the committee that you agree, and sit right back down. Mic drop optional.

05. Write it down.

Even if you didn't speak, written testimonies are added to the public record.

06. No mama jokes.

Believe us, we have tried.

Put your public testimony skills to work! Sign up for NFS Action Alerts, and you'll receive timely updates whenever there's an opportunity to speak up for the Pacific Northwest's wild, native fish!

From the Wellspring of Diversity

Abundant runs of spring Chinook once returned to almost every watershed on the Oregon Coast. Spring rain and rising water temperatures drew in salmon and coaxed them upstream to the deep refuge pools where they were uniquely suited to wait out the summer. Indigenous peoples cherished these fish for their high fat content and magnificent flavor, as well as the definitive punctuation their arrival put on each winter.

Springers are still a favorite of tribal fishers and sport anglers. But after more than a century of habitat degradation, overharvest, and ill-conceived hatcheries, the wild abundance of previous generations is hard to imagine.

Given their unique life history, peculiar habitat needs, and steady, century-long decline,

Oregon Coast spring Chinook appear to be an obvious candidate for protection under the Endangered Species Act. But attempts to list them are repeatedly sunk by the same bureaucratic distinction: Oregon Coast spring Chinook are managed with the relatively-well-off fall Chinook as a single population.

The best available science suggests that this lumping together of Chinook runs is indefensible. Again and again, rigorous studies arrive at the same conclusion: springers are genetically distinct from their fall-run counterparts. And we should manage them accordingly.

Abundant salmon runs spring from the deep and ancient well of their diverse life histories. By honoring that diversity, we can protect the native spring Chinook of the Oregon Coast and restore their wild abundance.

It's going to take all types to change the status quo for Oregon Coast spring Chinook. Learn more about our expanded opportunities to take action for wild fish by checking out the Native Fish Fellowship program at nativefishsociety.org/get-involved.

Last summer, the National Marine Fisheries Service denied our petition to list Oregon Coast spring Chinook under the Endangered Species Act. The listing petition was driven by a 2018 study from researchers at the University of California, Davis, which shows that spring Chinook are genetically distinct from their fall-run counterparts. We have continued to seek other paths to protection for these special fish. One such path will likely be the submission of an updated listing petition, bolstered by a recent publication that further supports our case. The science is clear: Springers are unique. And their dwindling populations on the Oregon Coast deserve every protection available.

The Abundance Possible

Fed by mountain snowmelt and glacial springs, the Shasta River once provided the most productive spawning and rearing habitat for salmon and steelhead in the Klamath Basin. But early in the twentieth century, private users began to divvy up Shasta water. If they thought at all about the effect this might have on the river's salmon and steelhead, it doesn't show. Dwindling runs now return to a river with high water temperatures and widespread colonies of toxic bacteria.

“My inspiration to start a Shasta River restoration campaign culminated that day with Kirk, when I swung up the only coho salmon I’ve touched in 25 years fishing the Klamath.”

— NFS RIVER STEWARD ANDY MARX

But the death of the Shasta is not inevitable. Even in its degraded state, the Shasta produces more juvenile salmon than any other Klamath tributary. And for the last two

decades, NFS River Steward Andy Marx has wrestled with this juxtaposition—both a witness to the stolen potential and a hopeful advocate for the abundance possible.

In 2020, Andy launched a grassroots campaign to restore instream flows, improve water quality, and remind water users that rivers are a public resource. Bolstered by a receptive Siskiyou community, NFS Action Alerts, and the support of other NFS River Stewards, the campaign has already secured minimum flow requirements, as well as limits on irrigation and pumping. The early success has allowed Andy to turn his attention to more fish-focused rules, like guaranteed instream flows for salmon, steelhead, and lamprey and the protection of cold water refugia.

Success on the Shasta is critical to making the Klamath River whole again. The dam removal process will begin, at long last, in 2023. When the final dam comes down, the Klamath's native fish will once again have access to more than 400 miles of historic habitat. And the Shasta will be waiting.

Inspired by Andy's work on behalf the Shasta? Check out the NFS River Steward Program at nativefishsociety.org/get-involved and let us know how we can support your efforts to protect and restore your homewaters!



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STRONG RUNS

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For each issue of Strong Runs NFS partners with an artist/designer/illustrator to bring the featured stories to life:

Always With Honor is the multidisciplinary creative studio of Elsa and Tyler Lang. For more than a decade, they've been painting, planting, illustrating and building brand and visual systems with warmth, optimism, and a sense of wonderment for clients of all sizes, near and far.

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NATIVE FISH SOCIETY is a non-profit organization that exists to cultivate the groundswell of public support needed to revive abundant wild fish, free-flowing rivers, and thriving local communities.

RIVER STEWARDS



NATIVE FISH FELLOWS



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NATIVE FISH SOCIETY

STRONG RUNS

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The Willamette Reborn

“This is the rebirth of these amazing rivers and a symbol of our capacity to make the changes needed to recover wild fish.”

— NFS CONSERVATION DIRECTOR JENNIFER FAIRBROTHER

As spring Chinook salmon seek out summer sanctuaries and winter steelhead smolts make their way downstream, over Willamette Falls, and to the Pacific, wild fish advocates in Oregon's Willamette Basin are celebrating a return. A return to more hospitable homewaters for native fish. And change. Change at eight United States Army Corps of Engineers dams in the Willamette Basin.

The explicit purpose of the changes to dam operations is to improve fish passage and

water quality throughout the state's largest watershed. Brought about by a September 2021 court order, it is the happy conclusion to our 2018 lawsuit against the Corps for Endangered Species Act violations.

Had the Corps met the requirements of a 2008 biological opinion from the National Marine Fisheries Service, it might have prevented the sustained decline of Willamette spring Chinook and winter steelhead. But the agency resisted even basic changes and continued to

do so for more than a decade.

Fortunately for wild fish, District Judge Marco Hernandez made it clear that the Court will not tolerate “further delay or obfuscation.” The Corps's responsibility to improve conditions for the Willamette's native winter steelhead and spring Chinook is now officially beyond debate.

1999
Upper Willamette River spring Chinook salmon and winter steelhead are listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act.

2009
The Corps fails to meet its deadline to remedy water temperature and dissolved gas problems caused by Detroit and Big Cliff dams on the North Santiam River.

2014
The Corps fails to meet its deadline to improve fish passage at Cougar Dam on the McKenzie River.

2018
We—alongside our partners at the Northwest Environmental Defense Center, WildEarth Guardians, and represented by Advocates For the West—sue the Corps for violating the Endangered Species Act.

Summer 2021
Hernandez orders the Corps to immediately change the way it operates its dams in the Willamette Basin.

For the last half century, a network of dams has blocked spring Chinook and winter steelhead from as much as 90 percent of their historic spawning habitat in the Willamette Basin. The high-head dams disrupt natural flows, alter water temperatures, trap sediment, and prevent the distribution of large woody debris—the building blocks of salmon and steelhead habitat

2008
NOAA Fisheries issues a biological opinion requiring the Corps to increase volitional passage for migrating fish and improve water quality in the Willamette River.

2010
The Corps fails to meet its deadline to remedy water temperature and dissolved gas problems at all dams in the Willamette Valley Project.

2017
The Corps cuts funding for the monitoring required by the 2008 BiOp.

Summer 2020
Federal Judge Marco Hernandez rules that the Corps's operations have jeopardized the Willamette's native spring Chinook and winter steelhead.

February 2022
The Corps and NOAA Fisheries publish the first report on fish-friendly changes made at dams on the Willamette River. The reports—which will come out every six months—help us better understand the impacts of court-ordered actions on wild fish.