

Chapter: 10

States: Oregon and Washington

Recovery Unit Name: Umatilla -Walla Walla

**Region 1
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Portland, Oregon**

DISCLAIMER

Recovery plans delineate reasonable actions that are believed necessary to recover and/or protect the species. Recovery plans are prepared by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and, in this case, with the assistance of recovery unit teams, State and Tribal agencies, and others. Objectives will be attained and any necessary funds made available subject to budgetary and other constraints affecting the parties involved, as well as the need to address other priorities. Recovery plans do not necessarily represent the views or the official positions or indicate the approval of any individuals or agencies involved in the plan formulation, other than the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Recovery plans represent the official position of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service *only* after they have been signed by the Director or Regional Director as *approved*. Approved recovery plans are subject to modification as dictated by new findings, changes in species status, and the completion of recovery tasks.

Literature Citation: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2002. Chapter 11, Umatilla-Walla Walla Recovery Unit, Oregon and Washington. 153 p. *In:* U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Bull Trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*) Draft Recovery Plan. Portland, Oregon.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Umatilla-Walla Walla recovery unit team includes technical experts from Oregon and Washington. A bull trout technical working group made up of area biologists was organized in the early 1990's to survey and monitor bull trout populations in the Umatilla and upper Walla Walla Basins. The group was expanded in 1999 to include other resource professionals and interested parties and split into two working groups to develop conservation strategies for bull trout in the Umatilla and Walla Walla Basins, excluding the Touchet River and its tributaries. Subsequent to bull trout listing and initiation of the recovery planning process, the previously established Walla Walla working group was combined with additional specialists with knowledge of the Touchet River Basin and together with the existing Umatilla-Walla Walla working group formed the Umatilla-Walla Walla recovery unit team.

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UMATILLA-WALLA WALLA RECOVERY UNIT CHAPTER OF THE BULL TROUT RECOVERY PLAN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CURRENT SPECIES STATUS

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service issued a final rule listing the Columbia River population of bull trout as a threatened species on June 10, 1998 (63 FR 31647). The Umatilla-Walla Walla Recovery Unit forms part of the range of the Columbia River population. The Umatilla-Walla Walla Recovery Unit encompasses the entire drainages of the Umatilla and Walla Walla Rivers. The Umatilla River Basin is located wholly in Oregon, while the Walla Walla River Basin includes portions in Oregon and Washington. The Umatilla River enters the Columbia River downstream of McNary Dam (River Mile 292) in Oregon, while the Walla Walla River enters the Columbia just upstream of McNary Dam, about 80 kilometers (50 miles) upstream of the mouth of the Umatilla River.

Little data exists on the historical or current use of the mainstem Columbia River by bull trout in this recovery unit. However, the Umatilla-Walla Walla recovery unit team believes that defining the current and potential use of the Columbia River should be considered a primary research need. Subsequent to the collection of additional information the Umatilla-Walla Walla Recovery Unit may be expanded to include portions of the mainstem Columbia River.

HABITAT REQUIREMENTS AND LIMITING FACTORS

A detailed discussion of bull trout biology and habitat requirements is provided in Chapter 1 of this recovery plan. The limiting factors discussed here are specific to the Umatilla-Walla Walla Recovery Unit chapter. Within the Umatilla-Walla Walla Recovery Unit, historical and current land use activities have impacted bull trout local populations. Historical land uses affecting bull trout habitat in the Walla Walla Basin include forest management, livestock grazing, irrigated agriculture, urbanization, and flood control management. Liberal harvest regulations and fish stocking programs have also been implicated

in the decline of bull trout. Existing land management facilities and activities that contribute to fish habitat problems include riparian road and railroad construction and use and associated toxic spills, riparian grazing, riparian (and to a lesser extent, upland) timber harvest, recreational and municipal water developments and withdrawals, recreational use of riparian areas, livestock water developments, channel modification for flood control, agricultural development, and competition with stocked hatchery rainbow trout.

RECOVERY GOAL AND OBJECTIVES

The goal of the bull trout recovery plan is to **ensure the long-term persistence of self-sustaining, complex, interacting groups of bull trout distributed throughout the species' native range, so that the species can be delisted.** To achieve this goal the following objectives have been identified for bull trout in the Umatilla-Walla Walla Recovery Unit:

- Maintain the current distribution of bull trout within the core areas and re-establish bull trout in previously occupied habitats.
- Maintain stable or increasing trends in abundance of bull trout in the Umatilla-Walla Walla Recovery Unit.
- Restore and maintain suitable habitat conditions for all bull trout life history stages and strategies.
- Conserve genetically diverse populations of bull trout populations within the Umatilla-Walla Walla Recovery Unit.

RECOVERY CRITERIA

Recovery criteria for the Umatilla-Walla Walla Recovery Unit reflect the stated objectives, evaluation of population status, and recovery actions necessary to achieve the overall goal. Recovery criteria identified for the Umatilla-Walla Walla Recovery Unit are as follows:

1. **Bull Trout are distributed among six or more local populations in the recovery unit, three in the Umatilla Core Area and three or more in the Walla Walla Core Area.** In a recovered condition the Umatilla Core Area would include the North Fork Umatilla, South Fork Umatilla, and North Fork Meacham Creek local populations. In the Walla Walla Core Area local populations would include the upper Walla Walla complex, Mill Creek, and the Touchet complex. Additional population studies and a better understanding of bull trout fidelity to their natal streams is needed to better define local populations in the recovery unit. There is potential to further separate the population within the upper Walla Walla complex into South Fork and North Fork local populations, and the Touchet complex into North Fork, South Fork, and Wolf Fork local populations.

2. **Estimated abundance of adult bull trout is a range between 3,500 and 10,000 individuals in the recovery unit distributed in each core area as follows: Umatilla Core Area from 500 to 5,000; Walla Walla Core Area from 3,000 to 5,000.** The recovered abundance range was derived using the professional judgement of the team and estimation of productive capacity of identified local populations.

3. **Adult bull trout exhibit a stable or increasing trend in abundance for at least two generations at or above the recovered abundance level within the recovery unit.** Achievement of this recovery criteria will be based on a minimum of at least 10 years of monitoring data.

4. **Specific barriers to bull trout movement in the Umatilla-Walla Walla Recovery Unit have been addressed.** Opportunities for passage within each core area are provided, ensuring opportunities for genetic exchange among local populations within each core area. In the Umatilla Core Area this means implementing actions to address thermal and low flow barriers in the mainstem and Meacham Creek and potential passage barriers to bull trout at Feed Canal and Three Mile Dam. In the Walla Walla Core Area this means providing suitable habitat conditions downstream of Nursery Bridge on the mainstem Walla Walla River, ensuring the ladder at Nursery Bridge will successfully pass bull trout, and screening diversions that

impact bull trout. On Mill Creek, barriers to be addressed include the City of Walla Walla intake dam and ensuring bull trout have the opportunity to access the Walla Walla River. In the Touchet subbasin, barriers to be addressed include improving passage at Hoffer Dam and Dayton ponds, screening unscreened diversions, and establishing at least seasonal connectivity between local populations and the mainstem Walla Walla River.

The Umatilla-Walla Walla recovery unit team expects that the recovery process will be dynamic and will be refined as more information becomes available. Recovery criteria for the Umatilla-Walla Walla Recovery Unit were established to assess whether recovery actions have resulted in the recovery of bull trout. Recovery criteria developed for bull trout address quantitative measurements of bull trout distribution and population characteristics. The recovery unit team expects recovery of bull trout to be a dynamic process occurring over time. The recovery objectives were based on our current knowledge and may be refined as more information becomes available. Future adaptive management will play a major role in recovery implementation and refinement of recovery criteria. While removal of bull trout as a species under the Act (*i.e.*, delisting) can only occur for the entity that was listed (Columbia River Distinct Population Segment), the recovery unit criteria listed above will be used to determine when the Umatilla-Walla Walla Recovery Unit is fully contributing to recovery of the population segment.

ACTIONS NEEDED

Recovery for bull trout will entail reducing threats to the long-term persistence of populations and their habitats, ensuring the security of multiple interacting groups of bull trout, and providing habitat conditions and access to them that allow for the expression of various life-history forms. Seven categories of actions are discussed in Chapter 1; tasks specific to this recovery unit are provided in this chapter.

ESTIMATED COST OF RECOVERY

Total estimated cost of bull trout recovery in the Umatilla-Walla Walla Recovery Unit is estimated at about 24 million dollars spread over a 25 year recovery period. Successful recovery of bull trout in the recovery unit is contingent on removing barriers and improving habitat conditions within the Umatilla and Walla Walla Rivers and their respective tributaries in Oregon and Washington. Total costs include estimates of expenditures by local, Tribal, State, and Federal governments and by private business and individuals. These costs are attributed to bull trout conservation but other aquatic species will also benefit. Cost estimates are not provided for tasks which are normal agency responsibilities under existing authorities.

ESTIMATED DATE OF RECOVERY

Expected time necessary to achieve recovery will vary among recovery units due to differences in bull trout status, factors affecting bull trout, implementation and effectiveness of recovery tasks, and responses to recovery tasks. A tremendous amount of work will be required to restore impaired habitat, reconnect habitat, and eliminate threats from nonnative species. Three to five bull trout generations (15 to 25 years), or possibly longer, may be necessary before identified threats to the species can be significantly reduced and bull trout can be considered eligible for delisting. In the Umatilla-Walla Walla Recovery Unit bull trout currently exist in very numbers in some local populations, and degradation and fragmentation of bull trout habitat presents significant migratory challenges for fluvial fish. Ultimately, these threats must be addressed in the near future if recovery will be achieved.