



# Steelhead advocates disappointed by new federal protections

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Locals who are working to restore steelhead habitat here say the latest federal protections for the fish are a letdown.

A revised critical habitat designation released by the National Marine Fisheries Service covers far fewer miles of rivers and streams on the West Coast than an earlier effort.

In particular, environmentalists are disappointed that the designation only includes places where endangered Southern California steelhead are currently found—not areas where the fish used to range before their passage was blocked by dams and other barriers.

“That’s where the fish used to be, and that’s where the best habitat is,” said David Pritchett of the Southern California Steelhead Coalition.

“Those are the areas that are critical to the recovery of the species,” added Brian Trautwein of the Santa Barbara-based Environmental Defense Center. “We can’t expect to recover steelhead in the small fragment of their habitat where they still are.”

Steelhead habitat on Vandenberg Air Force Base has also been excluded from the designation, the National Marine Fisheries Service said, because of national security needs and in recognition of the natural resource management plans that are in place for military bases.

The latest critical habitat designation covers 708 miles of waterways in Santa Barbara County, such as the Sisquoc River.

However, it excludes areas that Mr.

Trautwein said are excellent steelhead habitat — such as Santa Cruz, Mono and Indian creeks, which are all above Bradbury Dam, one of the biggest barriers to steelhead migration on the Central Coast. He said that may jeopardize efforts to modify barriers to allow steelhead to move into those areas.

Mr. Trautwein also criticized the economic analysis of the costs of the designation, which were calculated at \$81 million for California.

He said the analysis is “skewed” because it downplays the benefits of good steelhead habitat.

Steelhead restoration efforts in Santa Barbara have brought millions of dollars of grants to the area, Mr. Trautwein said, and “there’s economic benefits of having clean water and restoring steelhead habitat.”

According to the National Marine Fisheries Service, some areas of salmon and steelhead habitat have been excluded from the critical habitat designation because the costs of including them were deemed to outweigh the benefits.

An earlier designation, made in 2000, was withdrawn after a legal battle.

Decades ago, steelhead could be scooped out of local rivers by the pitchfork-full, but their numbers have dwindled as dams and other barriers have blocked the fish’s passage and pollution has degraded their habitat.

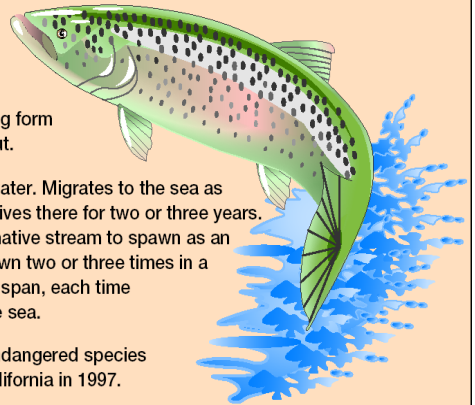
Locals have mounted an effort to clean up steelhead habitat and modify barriers that block the fish’s way from the sea to rivers and streams where they spawn.

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### Steelhead trout



- The ocean-going form of rainbow trout.
- Born in fresh water. Migrates to the sea as a juvenile and lives there for two or three years. Returns to its native stream to spawn as an adult. May spawn two or three times in a seven-year life span, each time returning to the sea.
- Listed as an endangered species in Southern California in 1997.

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