

Wild Fish Conference Takes Wide Measure Of Olympic Research

More than 250 people — mostly fishery scientists but including sportsmen, Indian tribal representatives, commercial fishermen, and representatives of state and federal agencies involved with Olympic fisheries — attended the first Olympic Wild Fish Conference at Peninsula College in Port Angeles, Wash., on March 24-26.

Jointly sponsored by Olympic National Park and the College's fisheries technology program, the meeting consisted of nine sessions, ranging from discussions of genetic differentiation among wild fish stocks to strategies for managing the various stocks and the major habitats. Thirty-eight scientific papers were presented, in addition to which key agency officials, authors, and other interested parties were heard from. Doug Houston and John Aho of the ONP staff and Jim Walton of Peninsula College were in charge of the conference arrangements.

The conference was a top-level slice of the research and management processes that will determine the fate of native wild stocks of fish on the Peninsula. Many questions were, of necessity, left unanswered, underlining the need for additional research. But a number of areas of consensus also emerged.

No. 1: The native stocks that once provided truly fabulous runs of salmon and trout up into the interior of the Olympic Peninsula are greatly reduced.

No. 2: Hatchery fish are a poor substitute for the richness that is gone.

No. 3: The whole idea of hatchery "enhancement" needs careful study and evaluation. Conferees refused to reject the hatchery concept out of hand, but insisted that the uses of hatchery fish be stringently assessed, with an eye to the effect on remaining native stocks.

Some Conference quotes:

Bill Wilkerson, director of Washington Dept. of Fisheries: Conserving fish resources is the Washington Department of Fisheries' main goal; providing harvestable fish for the sports angler and commercial fisherman is the second priority.

John D. McIntyre, National Marine Fisheries Service: A **stock** is a **process**. The **species** is the means by which a stock maintains its genetic diversity. We're talking here about taking a slice out of a dynamic, changing situation. Change a well-defined stock to another habitat, and by our own definition of a species, it should be maladapted.

Jim Johnston, Washington Department of Game: We **must** address the concept of labeling certain wild stocks as "non-viable." The long term implications of this concept should lead to its abandonment. If I have one criticism of my own profession it's that we tend to think in time frames no longer than our own lifetimes, and that isn't long enough.

C.J. Cederholm, Washington Department of Natural Resources: We have to get back to regulating the runs and guaranteeing adequate escapement. The best enhancement is regulation of the harvest.

Doug Houston, National Park Service research biologist: Escapement of fish beyond the numbers required to produce the future maximum sustained yield, tend to be viewed as "wasted" — i.e. it does not pass through either (a) the human digestive tract, or (b) the human pocketbook. This view is entirely inappropriate within a National Park.

Ernest Salo, University of Washington (in answer to an audience question "How do you get rid of pork barrel projects?"): You go in with a bulldozer early on a Sunday morning when everyone in town is down with a hangover, level the hatchery, and get out of town."

Dick Goin, Olympic Outdoor Sportsmen's Club: The rivers, all of them, literally came to a roiling, madly energetic life when the runs were on. Huge steelheads, chinooks, chums — honest 20-pounders, skunks, bears, gulls, eagles — incredible numbers of fish of unbelievable size. The Elwha once was the greatest river on the Peninsula. Its geology and components dictated

that it would have the greatest fish runs because it was the river that most severely tested those runs. Now the whole process is on its last legs because of two dams — constructed without fish passage facilities. These fish have waited 70 years to come home. Isn't it time?

From a National Park Service perspective, an important objective of this conference was to force various people to pull together and interpret information that had been accumulating in agency files — information on the ecology and management of the populations of wild fish that occur in this unique corner of the world. The need was to see what it was, how good it was, whether it supported the interpretations that had been made of it. From this perspective, the conference was rated by NPS personnel in attendance as a "considerable success."

Sponsors, in addition to Olympic NP and Peninsula College, were Olympic Outdoor Sports Association, Peninsula Plywood, Peninsula Fly Fishers, Crown Zellerbach, ITT Rayonier, Inc., American Fisheries Society (Pacific Northwest chapter), and the PNW National Parks and Monuments Association.

Publication of the papers, in a **Proceedings**, is underway.