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Fishing

Proposal may reduce fishing on Millicoma

By Thomas Moriarty, The World Apr 26, 2013

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Carl Martin feeds the approximately 300,000 chinook salmon fry in tanks at the Millicoma S Allegany on Friday. Under management changes proposed by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, salmon raised at the hatchery may be released at locations further down the river system. This is eliminating or reducing several smaller steelhead hatchery programs.

By Alysha Beck, The World



Millicoma Fish Hatchery
Apr 26, 2013

COOS BAY — Standing at the railing of a fish tank at the Millicoma Interpretive Center, hatchery host Carl Martin said he looks forward to the arrival of Chinook spawning season every year.

Martin said the hatchery, run through the state's Salmon and Trout Enhancement Program, raises as many as 1 million salmon fry a year. The center is the primary source of hatchery-raised salmon on the Millicoma River.

But those fish could be directed elsewhere under fishery management changes proposed by the Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife.

Under the proposed Coastal Conservation and Management Plan, the agency is considering eliminating or shifting the location of certain salmon and steelhead hatchery programs run through STEP.

That could mean the end of fishing opportunities for hatchery salmon in the Millicoma River, as well as a decrease in hatchery steelhead fishing opportunities in the South Coos and Coquille Rivers. Hatchery fish provide the bulk of fishing opportunities on those rivers, because of bag limits on wild fish.

Mike Stahl, the department's assistant manager of conservation and recovery programs, said all the proposed changes are preliminary.

"We put this up for discussion," Stahl said.

The changes could include elimination or reduction of smaller hatcheries on the Coos and Coquille rivers. Salmon raised at the Millicoma hatchery could be redirected to other rivers.

"The fish would still be reared here, but they would be released lower in the system," Stahl said.

Stahl said changes or reductions in steelhead hatchery programs would be primarily geared toward emphasizing wild versus hatchery populations in those rivers.

Friday afternoon, Martin was busy feeding the approximately 300,000 Chinook fry swimming in the hatchery's tanks. He said

that back in the 1960s, there were almost no salmon in the Millicoma River.

“It’d be a great loss to shut this Chinook fishery down,” he said.

The state Legislature established STEP in 1981 to promote citizen involvement in salmon and trout management programs.

The South Coast Anglers/STEP Association plans a meeting to discuss the proposed changes at 6 p.m., May 4 at Coos Bay’s Millicoma Intermediate School. South Coast Anglers President Bruce Bertrand was not immediately available for comment.