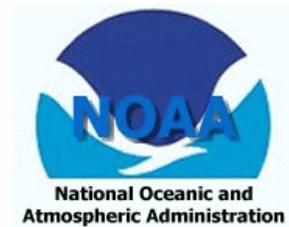

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***Fisheries Service Launches Search
for Experts to Aid Salmon Recovery***

The National Marine Fisheries Service announced today it is embarking on an ambitious long-term campaign that will eventually forge recovery plans for all 26 Washington, Oregon, California and Idaho salmon and steelhead populations protected by the federal Endangered Species Act.

The federal agency said as an initial step in creating these plans, it is launching a comprehensive search for experts to serve on a recovery science review panel that will guide the recovery planning process in the four western states within the agency's Northwest and Southwest regions.

"This search is the very first step of a long but essential journey," said William Stelle, head of the fisheries service's Northwest Region in Seattle, where the initial recovery effort will begin. "There's no manual we can pull down from the shelf that will show us how recovery takes place. Every salmon population is different; every habitat is different from Seattle to southern California."

In addition to soliciting nominees for the science review panel, the agency's Northwest region is seeking nominees for two technical review teams that will begin work next year in the Puget Sound and the Willamette and Lower Columbia river basins. The solicitation is seeking experts with local knowledge of the listed fish populations and experience in fisheries, ecology or similar fields.

The principal task of the technical recovery teams will be to develop recovery goals and standards by which achievement can be measured.

"We're determined to assemble a review panel and technical recovery teams made up of the most talented experts we can find, wherever they may be," Stelle said. "This work is going to be a formidable scientific, intellectual and organizational challenge, and nothing short of the best will do."

Rod McInnis, the acting administrator for the agency's Southwest region in Long Beach, Calif., said both regions are sending a solicitation letter to universities, state and

tribal agencies, conservation groups and other organizations seeking experts who could serve on the oversight science review panel. He said the panel will review nominees to the technical recovery teams as well as advise the agencies' science centers in Seattle and San Diego on the scientific and technical aspects of the coast-wide recovery-planning effort.

Stelle added that because the scientific credibility and integrity of the recovery planning effort is so important, selection of the review panel and oversight of its operation will be carried out by the directors of the fisheries service's two West Coast science centers, which are independent of the agency's management program.

The agency said each of the technical recovery teams will be made up of six to nine members, including a representative from the fisheries service itself. The science panel will have three to five members.

Stelle said that although completion of recovery plans is likely to be "very long-term," he expects the selection process to be concluded by early next year. The technical team members will serve two-year terms. Members of the science panel will serve three-year terms.

The agency said that recovery plans will be designed to provide a "road map" for improving the status of a protected species, so that it is no longer considered threatened or endangered and can be removed from the federal list. The agency added that while the recovery plans will by necessity be comprehensive, they will build on efforts already underway in many areas, including work being done by state and local governments, Indian tribes and private conservation groups.

The Federal Register notice describing the solicitation can be obtained by visiting the fishery service's Northwest home page, at www.nwr.noaa.gov.

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