



File Code: 1950

Date: February 16, 2010

Dear Interested Citizen,

The Sisters Ranger District of the Deschutes National Forest would like to know your concerns, questions, and suggestions regarding a project proposal to provide fish passage at the dam located at the outlet of Suttle Lake. Your comments will help us identify issues to be considered in the environmental review of this project.

Background and Existing Condition

The Deschutes River basin is an important landscape for the conservation of bull trout, sockeye, and Chinook salmon fish stocks. The Metolius Watershed, a subset of the Deschutes River basin, has been identified as a Key Watershed under the Northwest Forest Plan (NWFP) and currently has healthy populations of bull trout and redband trout. Chinook salmon fry were reintroduced to the Metolius and Lake Creek in 2008. In addition, the Metolius Watershed has been identified as a Priority Watershed for the Deschutes National Forest. The Metolius Watershed is located above the Pelton/Round Butte dam complex that forms Lake Billy Chinook.

Historically, sockeye salmon occurred in the Deschutes River sub-basin, migrating up the Columbia River to the Deschutes River and then up the Metolius River to Suttle Lake via Lake Creek. Sockeye salmon require a lake for the juvenile portion of their life history. Suttle Lake is one of two lakes in Oregon that historically had native runs of Sockeye salmon.

Native sockeye runs may have still existed but were depleted by other fish passage barriers before the completion Round Butte Dam (which formed Lake Billy Chinook) in 1964. Historical surveys reported that a four foot tall power dam and upright screen were installed at the outlet of Suttle Lake in 1930. In 1950 Oregon Department of Fish and Willife (ODFW) reported that "Blueback (Sockeye) salmon formerly ascended to Suttle Lake, but none have been seen for a number of years." A fish passage survey of the Deschutes River by ODFW in 1942 revealed that: "There is a concrete power dam, 4 feet high, at the outlet of the stream from Suttle Lake. This dam may have been responsible for the disappearance of the blueback salmon run. The spillway has a 15 inch flashboard at the upper end of a sloping concrete apron 11 feet long that would be impassable except under very favorable circumstances. The 3-step fishway is too small for large fish and is blocked at the upper end by a stationary screen."

Recent relicensing efforts at the Pelton/Round Butte dam complex have led to fish passage improvements at the dam complex and passage of adult salmon and trout is expected in 2011-2012. Fish passage would result in the reintroduction of Chinook, and sockeye salmon into the



Metolius River and Lake Creek. The old dam at the outlet of Suttle Lake is still a potential upstream migration barrier to fish especially during summer and fall low flow conditions. August and September is the time of year when adult sockeye are expected to be migrating over the dam to reach spawning areas in Link Creek.

Additionally, the draft bull trout recovery plan identifies fish passage as an issue that needs to be remedied to facilitate full recovery of fish populations in the watershed. The completion of fish passage improvement projects will allow the Metolius Watershed to move closer to restoring access to all areas once historically accessible to trout and salmon. The Sisters Ranger District and Deschutes National Forest have successfully completed several fish passage projects similar to this in the past.

Project Location

The project is located on the Sisters Ranger District west of the town of Sisters at the outlet of Suttle Lake. Below the dam is the start of Lake Creek which flows into the Metolius River at Camp Sherman. The legal description of the dam is: Section 24, Township 13 South, and Range 8 East, of the Willamette Meridian.

Purpose and Need for Action

The *purpose* of this project is to provide fish passage for migrating fish including spring Chinook and sockeye salmon. There is a *need* to modify the existing dam at the outlet of Suttle Lake to provide fish passage.

Specifically, the project would: Restore and improve passage to spawning and rearing habitat for spring Chinook salmon, kokanee/sockeye salmon, bull trout, redband trout, and other aquatic species.

Proposed Action

The Sisters Ranger District proposes to modify the dam at the outlet of Suttle Lake to provide year round upstream fish passage. The dam would be notched with a shallow V shape and a low flow channel with a series of step pools would be constructed below the notch. The constructed channel would be made of native materials including boulders, cobbles, gravels and woody debris. A minor drop in the lake level may occur. Impacts to recreational use in and along the lake are expected to be minimal. The dam modification to improve fish passage would occur as soon as 2011 or 2012, depending on available funding for the project.

Decision to be Made

The decision to be made by implementing the Proposed Action will be whether or not to provide fish passage on the dam at the outlet of Suttle Lake. My decision will be based on the results obtained from the analysis by Forest Service specialists and any public comments received.

At this time, it is anticipated that the project can be documented in a Categorical Exclusion (CE). The project will meet Forest-wide and Management Area standards and guidelines as described in the Deschutes National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP), as amended by the Northwest Forest Plan. The site is located in a Riparian Reserve as designated by the Northwest Forest Plan.

In addition, the proposed action will meet the requirements for Regionally recognized aquatic habitat restoration activities as described in the *Biological Assessment for USDA Forest Service (Pacific Northwest Region), USDI Bureau of Land Management (Oregon State Office) and the Coquille Indian Fish Restoration Activities Affecting ESA and MSA-listed Animal and Plant Species Found in Oregon and Washington*.

How to Participate and Submit Comments

You are invited to comment on this Proposed Action. Your comments will help identify issues to be considered in the environmental review. Please submit your written comments by March 18, 2009 so they can be considered in the analysis.

Please submit your comments to Suttle Lake Dam Fish Passage Project, Project Manager, Nate Dachtler, Post Office Box 249, Sisters, OR 97759; Telephone (541) 549-7701; FAX (541) 549-7746. Hand-delivered and oral comments may be delivered to the Sisters Ranger District located at the corner of Highway 20 and Pine Street in Sisters, Oregon during normal business hours: 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p. m. Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. Comments may also be submitted through email to ndachtler@fs.fed.us. Please put "Suttle Lake Dam Fish Passage Project" in the subject line of your email.

To help us reach as many interested parties as possible during this "scoping" period, please share this letter with others who may be interested. Please also let us know if there is someone who should be added to our mailing list, or if you have any address corrections. If you prefer not to receive future correspondence about this project, we request that you let us know and we will remove your name from the mailing list.

Thank you for your interest in natural resource management on the Sisters Ranger District.

Sincerely,

William Anthony /S/

BILL ANTHONY
District Ranger