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***Conservation Groups to Sue Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife  
Over State Fish Hatchery Operations***

Portland, OR- Oregon's state-run fish hatcheries are routinely violating the Clean Water Act. A coalition of six conservation organizations initiated legal proceedings today to redress these violations by sending the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) a formal notice of intent to file a citizen suit against the agency.

"Oregon's state-run hatchery program is causing environmental degradation well beyond levels permitted by the Clean Water Act," according to Mark Riskedahl, Executive Director of the Northwest Environmental Defense Center (NEDC). This is not the first time that ODFW's hatchery program has come under scrutiny for Clean Water Act violations. In 2001, the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) issued a formal Notice of Noncompliance to ODFW for pervasive water quality violations it characterized as "systemic". These violations have continued largely unabated. In fact, there have been over 1,500 separate violations since DEQ's original notice in 2001.

The significance of these continued violations in tight economic times is not lost on Joe Whitworth, Executive Director of Oregon Trout. " While most every other state program has undergone round after round of belt-tightening, ODFW perpetuates a program with steep ecological and financial costs -- too steep. These violations demonstrate a clear need for greater scrutiny of a program that's both expensive and broken."

Over 5 million pounds of commercial "closed formula" feed passed through state-run hatcheries into Oregon's waters last year alone. ODFW is uncertain what proprietary ingredients the feed contains, though independent scientists and federal agencies have expressed concern that the feed is contaminated with toxic constituents. Undigested feed and various other chemicals used in the hatchery production process combine with the large volume of fish feces to result in water quality violations.

"ODFW is not above the law. It must be held to the same standard to which private polluters are held, and it must comply with the Clean Water Act", stated Chris Winter, an attorney with Cascade Resources Advocacy Group (CRAG), a public interest environmental law firm in Portland, Oregon representing the conservation groups.

Decrepit hatchery infrastructure and serious mismanagement have led to a situation in which a major overhaul of Oregon's hatchery program would be necessary to meet minimum legal standards. Joining NEDC on the suit are Oregon Trout, Trout Unlimited, the Native Fish Society, Pacific Rivers Council and the Oregon Natural Resources Council.

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