

**SALMON AND STEELHEAD
HABITAT LIMITING FACTORS**
IN THE
**WASHINGTON COASTAL
STREAMS OF WRIA 21**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	2
TABLE OF CONTENTS	3
LIST OF TABLES	5
LIST OF FIGURES	6
WRIA 21 MAP APPENDIX TABLE OF CONTENTS	7
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	8
INTRODUCTION	10
Habitat Limiting Factors Background	10
The Relative Role of Habitat in Healthy Populations of Natural Spawning Salmon ...	11
Introduction to Habitat Impacts	17
SALMONID DISTRIBUTION AND WATERSHED DESCRIPTION AND CONDITION FOR STREAMS IN WRIA 21	18
Introduction	18
The Quinault Basin Habitat Description and Salmon Distribution	18
The Queets Basin Habitat Description and Salmon Distribution	23
The Kalaloch Basin Habitat Description and Salmon Distribution	26
The Raft River Basin Habitat Description and Salmon Distribution	27
The Moclips Basin Habitat Description and Salmon Distribution	28
The Copalis Basin Habitat Description and Salmon Distribution	28
SALMONID STOCK STATUS IN WRIA 21	30
Salmonid Status in the Quinault Basin	30
Salmonid Stock Status in the Queets Basin	32
Salmonid Stock Status in the Kalaloch Creek Basin	33
Salmonid Stock Status in the Raft River Basin	33
Salmonid Stock Status in the Moclips River Basin	33
Salmonid Stock Status in the Copalis River Basin	34
HABITAT LIMITING FACTORS IN WRIA 21	35
Categories of Habitat Limiting Factors used by the Washington State Conservation Commission	35
Rating Habitat Conditions	37
Habitat Limiting Factors in the Quinault Basin	38
Habitat Limiting Factors in the Queets Basin	58
Habitat Limiting Factors in the Kalaloch Creek Basin	80
Habitat Limiting Factors in the Raft River Basin	83

Habitat Limiting Factors in the Moclips River and Joe Creek Basins	87
Habitat Limiting Factors in the Copalis River and Connor Creek Basins	91
Estuary and Near Shore Conditions in WRIA 21	93
Known Salmonid Habitat Blocking Culverts in WRIA 21.....	98
ASSESSMENT OF HABITAT LIMITING FACTORS	101
RECOMMENDATIONS AND DATA NEEDS FOR WRIA 21 HABITAT LIMITING FACTORS.....	116
Recommendations for Salmonid Habitat Restoration Actions in the Quinault Basin	116
Recommendations for Salmonid Habitat Restoration Actions in the Queets Basin ...	117
Recommendations for Salmonid Habitat Restoration Actions in the Kalaloch, Raft, Moclips, Joe, Copalis, and other Small Coastal Watersheds	119
Recommendations for Salmonid Habitat Restoration Actions in WRIA 21 Estuaries and Near Shore Habitat	120
Data Needs for Salmonid Habitat Assessments in the Quinault Basin.....	120
Data Needs for Salmonid Habitat Assessments in the Queets Basin.....	122
Data Needs for Salmonid Habitat Assessments in the Kalaloch, Raft, Moclips, Joe, Copalis, and other Small Coastal Watersheds.....	123
Recommendations for Salmonid Habitat Assessments in WRIA 21 Estuaries and Near Shore Habitat.....	124
LITERATURE CITED	125

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Stock Status of Salmon, Trout and Char in the Quinault Basin.....	31
Table 2. Queets Basin Salmon, Trout and Char Stock Status.....	32
Table 3. Salmonid Stock Status in the Kalaloch Creek Sub-Basin.....	33
Table 4. Salmonid Stock Status in the Moclips River Basin.	34
Table 5. Salmonid Stock Status in the Copalis Basin.	34
Table 6. Summary of summer water temperature ranges and observed dissolved oxygen and pH levels in Queets River and tributaries.....	73
Table 7. Temperature monitoring results in three Queets River tributaries (U.S. Forest Service, unpublished data 2001).	76
Table 8. Quinault Indian Nation water quality monitoring summaries 1995 to 1998. (G. Onwumere, Quinault Indian Nation, unpublished data 2001).	90
Table 9. Source documents for the development of standards.....	102
Table 10. Salmonid habitat condition standards.	103
Table 11. System for rating estuarine habitat conditions.....	108
Table 12. Summary of WRIA 21 Limiting Factors Results.....	110

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Land ownership in the Quinault Basin (Quinault Indian Nation and U.S. Forest Service 1999).....	22
Figure 2. Land ownership in the Kalaloch, Raft, Moclips, and Copalis Basins.	27
Figure 3 Wetlands in the lower Quinault sub-basin (Quinault Indian Nation and U.S. Forest Service 1999).....	42
Figure 4. Near term large woody debris recruitment potential in the lower Quinault basin (Quinault Indian Nation and U.S. Forest Service 1999).	49
Figure 5. Shade conditions in the lower Quinault basin (Quinault Indian Nation and U.S. Forest Service 1999).....	50
Figure 6. Percent riparian vegetation stages in response channels of the Quinault basin (data from Lunetta et al. 1997).....	51
Figure 7. Hydrologic maturity in the Quinault Basin (data from Lunetta et al. 1997). ...	55
Figure 8. Riparian vegetation conditions by WAU in the Queets Basin (data from Lunetta et al. 1997).....	71
Figure 9. Vegetation age within the Queets Basin WAUs (data from Lunetta et al. 1997).	79
Figure 10. Riparian vegetation in the Kalaloch WAU (data from Lunetta et al. 1997)...	82
Figure 11. Land cover vegetation type in the Kalaloch WAU (data from Lunetta et al. 1997).....	83
Figure 12. Riparian vegetation type within the Copalis, Joe/Moclips, and Raft River WAUs (data from Lunetta et al. 1997).....	85
Figure 13. Land cover vegetation in the Copalis, Joe/Moclips, and Raft WAUs (data from Lunetta et al. 1997).....	87
Figure 14. Wide beach stretch near the Moclips River (photo from DOE 2001b).	96
Figure 15. Sea cliffs near the Quinault River mouth (photo from DOE 2001b).....	96
Figure 16. Bank Hardening along Mouth of Joe Creek (photo from WA DOE 2001b)..	97

WRIA 21 MAP APPENDIX TABLE OF CONTENTS

Several maps have been included with this report for your reference. The maps are appended to the report, either as a separate electronic file (for the electronic copy of this report) or separate printed section (for hard copy). The maps are included as a separate electronic file to enable the reader to utilize computer multi-tasking capabilities to simultaneously bring up the map and associated text. Below is a list of maps that are included in the WRIA 21 map appendix/file:

Map 1. Location of WRIA 21	2
Map 2a. Known distribution of spring/summer chinook salmon in WRIA 21	3
Map 2b. Known distribution of fall chinook salmon in WRIA 21	4
Map 2c. Known distribution of coho salmon in WRIA 21	5
Map 2d. Known distribution of sockeye salmon in WRIA 21	6
Map 2e. Known distribution of winter steelhead trout in WRIA 21	7
Map 2f. Known distribution of chum salmon in WRIA 21	8
Map 2g. Known distribution of pink salmon in WRIA 21	9
Map 2h. Known distribution of char in WRIA 21	10
Map 2i. Known distribution of cutthroat trout in WRIA 21	11
Map 2j. Known distribution of summer steelhead trout in WRIA 21	12
Map 3. Riparian conditions in the Quinault Basin	13

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As directed under Engrossed Substitute House Bill 2496 and Second Engrossed Second Substitute Senate Bill 5595, the habitat conditions of salmonid-producing watersheds within WRIA 21 are reviewed and rated. This includes conditions within the Queets, Quinault, Kalaloch, Raft, Moclips, and Copalis Basins in addition to other smaller streams within WRIA 21. The worst habitat problems are summarized here, but an overview of all the habitat ratings is provided in the Assessment Chapter. The Assessment Chapter also specifies the criteria used to rate habitat conditions. Other components of this report include detailed discussions for each of the habitat conditions, which can be found within the Habitat Limiting Factors Chapter. Also, maps of updated salmon and steelhead trout distribution and riparian conditions are located in a separate electronic file on this disc. This first round report examines salmon and steelhead trout habitat conditions. Later versions will address habitat issues for other salmonids.

One major impediment to assess habitat conditions in this WRIA is the lack of detailed field information. Some data were available in the Quinault, Salmon, and Sams Rivers and the Matheny Creek watershed analyses as well as in an off-channel habitat report for the Clearwater River, but habitat data for other streams were lacking or found only at a coarse scale. New data are expected from the Raft River watershed analysis, as well as from road and culvert assessments conducted by the Washington Department of Natural Resources, but many data needs remain, especially regarding blockages to fish habitat, floodplain conditions, sedimentation, riparian conditions, and water quality measurements.

In the Quinault Basin, little is known about blockages to fish habitat, including lateral blockages to off-channel habitat in the lower Quinault WAU. However, one major concern regarding floodplain conditions is the bank hardening and floodplain road impacts along the Quinault River upstream of Lake Quinault. This area has experienced road washouts and numerous channel changes. It is also an important spawning reach for sockeye salmon, a stock at risk in the Quinault Basin. In addition, sediment problems associated with road fills and undersized culverts are a noteworthy problem in the timber-managed areas of the Quinault Basin. Riparian conditions are mostly “fair” to “good”, with more impacts in the Lake Quinault WAU, and this area also rated “poor” for warm water temperatures. Lake Quinault acts as a buffer to flood events, and flow analysis indicates no trends in peak flows over time. However, the lower Quinault and Cook/Elk Creek WAUs have experienced a considerable loss of hydrologic maturity. The oligotrophic lake is rated “good” for habitat conditions with the exception of nutrient cycling, which is rated “poor” due to declining returns of sockeye salmon.

In the Queets Basin, three watershed analyses provided data for Matheny Creek, the Salmon River, and the Sams River. Extensive habitat surveys for some Clearwater and lower Queets River tributaries were also available. Other than that, recent fine-scale data were generally lacking for the Clearwater sub-basin and for watersheds other than Matheny Creek, the Salmon River, and the Sams River. Access conditions are rated “good” for lands within the Olympic National Park and in the Salmon River. Elsewhere

in the Queets Basin, access conditions are a data need. Floodplain impacts such as bank hardening and roads are minimal; however, loss of off-channel habitat is a major concern, especially in the Clearwater, Salmon, and Sams Rivers and in Matheny Creek.

Excess sediment inputs are likely in the timber-managed areas, particularly in the Clearwater sub-basin where road densities are high. Large road fills with small culverts and mid-slope roads in high mass wasting potential areas are the major current concerns, and these problems have been identified throughout the Clearwater, Salmon, and Sams Rivers and in Matheny Creek. Riparian conditions are mostly “good” throughout the Queets Basin, except in the lower Queets and lower Clearwater WAUs, where conditions are mixed. Water temperatures greater than the State AA standard were found in the lower Queets mainstem, lower Sams River, lower Matheny Creek, and the Salmon River, with even warmer temperatures (up to 20.1°C) in the lower Clearwater River. Flow data are insufficient to provide a good analysis, but land cover data indicate that most of the Matheny Creek, the lower Queets WAU, and the entire Clearwater sub-basins rated “poor” for hydrologic maturity.

There are many smaller streams in this WRIA that drain to the Pacific Ocean. The larger ones include Kalaloch and Joe Creeks, and the Raft, Copalis, and Moclips Rivers, in addition to the smaller watersheds, such as Duck, Whale, Camp, Conner, Boone and Wreck Creeks. Data for habitat conditions were generally lacking for all of these basins except for coarse-level data on the WAU level.

Little is known regarding fish habitat access and floodplain conditions in any of these smaller watersheds. Road density is high in Kalaloch Creek and the Raft River WAU, with “fair” road densities in the Moclips River/Joe Creek and Copalis WAUs. Riparian conditions in Kalaloch Creek, the Moclips River and Joe Creek WAU, and the Copalis WAU are mostly “fair” to “good”, while predominately “fair” riparian conditions exist in the Raft River. Warm water temperatures have been documented in the Raft and Moclips Rivers, and low dissolved oxygen levels have led to a 303(d) listing for Joe Creek. Hydrologic maturity is “good” in Kalaloch Creek and the Copalis River WAUs and “poor” in the Raft River and Moclips River/Joe Creek WAUs.

Most estuarine areas within WRIA 21 have no bank hardening, although there has likely been a loss of LWD compared to historic levels. Generally, the estuarine habitat is rated “good”. One exception is the more extensive bank armoring along lower Joe Creek, but quantification is needed to provide a rating. Much of the near shore habitat is part of the Copalis Rock National Wildlife Sanctuary and is rated “good”. One concern is the recent decline in giant kelp, but the cause (natural or human-caused) of the decline is unknown.