



Fish to benefit despite the discharge of treated sewage

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MOLALLA, Ore. -- The Native Fish Society is concerned about the possibly damaging effects of bacteria, toxins, chemicals and pharmaceuticals that pass into watersheds from the discharge of treated sewage into rivers by municipalities.

Sewage treatment plant safeguards that, if managed properly, protect against bacteria and toxins, fail to rid sewage of pharmaceutical pollution. When municipalities dump treated sewage into our river systems, they pump drug-tainted water directly into the watershed. Several studies have documented the negative effects of endocrine disrupters and other hormone treatments and chemicals on fish populations, but no one yet knows the extent of this emerging problem.

"Much of the stuff that is in wastewater we know is very harmful and some of that we don't know yet," said NFS Member and Portland General Electric Fisheries Biologist Doug Cramer. "We are finding that specific chemicals change fish behavior and ecology over the long term. Some of the chemicals, even in small amounts, have a dramatic effect on physiology, survival, growth and development."

The Native Fish Society was the only fish conservation organization willing to take a stand on this issue when it initiated a lawsuit against the city of Molalla this summer. The \$5.7 million suit was filed against the city for hundreds of federal Clean Water Act violations occurring between 1998-2006.

The lawsuit was an attempt to force the city of Molalla to develop an alternative to discharging its treated sewage into the Molalla River. The city of Molalla refused to abandon its plan, and in December, began dumping treated sewage into the river. Prior to December, the Molalla was one of only a few local rivers that was not used as a discharge point for sewage.

NFS and its partners in the lawsuit decided to settle with the city of the Molalla on Wednesday.

"We all live in this community and ultimately the citizens of Molalla would have to pay if we proceeded with the suit," said Native Fish Society Molalla River Steward Tom Derry. "We wanted a settlement that would pay for mitigation for the potential compromising of water quality and fish habitat on the Molalla River without hurting the pocketbook of Molalla residents, and that is what we got."

Under the terms of the settlement, the city of Molalla will have to pay \$110,000 for Molalla River environmental enhancement projects. The money will be spent to conduct fish monitoring, water

temperature monitoring and water quality monitoring, as well as riparian restoration.

The money does not come directly to NFS, but instead goes to Molalla Riverwatch, another non-profit group committed to protecting the Molalla River.

"This is an outstanding opportunity to benefit water quality and fish and wildlife habitat of the Molalla River," said Molalla RiverWatch Executive Director Kay Patteson. "We look forward to working on programs that will improve fish and wildlife habitat and the quality of life of the people who live in this natural, rural environment."

Thanks to the efforts of NFS and the other concerned citizens in the lawsuit, the settlement also includes several provisions to ensure the city does not continue to violate the Clean Water Act. Highlights of those provisions include:

- The city must monitor water quality both above and below the effluent outflow into the river.
- The city must cease discharge to the river in the event of flood conditions.
- The city must use a more environmentally-friendly de-chlorinating agent.
- Future Clean Water Act violations will be enforced by a federal judge and not the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, which did not fine the city for any of its past violations and sided with the city in the lawsuit.
- The city must treat to Level IV its effluent discharged as irrigation water in the summer months by May 1, 2008.
- The city must establish a 24-hour hotline for reporting irrigation violations.
- The city must establish a no spray buffer of 500 feet around all irrigation ditches until it treats to Level IV, and once it has treated to that level, must establish a buffer of 250 feet.

Native Fish Society River Stewards, in cooperation with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, are currently working to determine the population size of the two ESA-listed threatened fish in the Molalla River: winter steelhead and spring Chinook salmon. Data collected from these surveys will be used to properly manage the river for abundance of these fish.

For more information on the NFS Molalla River Steward Program, please visit www.nativefishsociety.org/documents/MolallaRiverStewardReport2006.pdf