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# Rescue planned for fish in danger

## Endangered trout project unrealistic, some say

By Zeke Barlow

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Ten years after the steelhead trout was placed on the endangered species list, an outline has been released on how to recover the species.

Scientists hope the outline will not only lead to increased steelhead populations, but also create water-

sheds in which a menagerie of species will thrive in healthier ecosystems.

"Even though we couch the recovery in terms of a single species, when we are protecting water quality or riparian habitats, we are providing protection for dozens, if not hundreds of species," said Mark Capelli, area recovery coordinator with the Na-

tional Marine Fisheries Service, which drew up the plan. An outline for recovery is mandated after a species is placed on the endangered species list.

Parts of the plan detailing changes that need to happen are almost guaranteed to be controversial in the often contentious world of water use in

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regulatory teeth and can not force any agency to make the changes it proposes. However, other parts of the Endangered Species Act do have the power to issue fines or prison time for killing an endangered species.

More specific details about what needs to happen and what number of steelhead makes a viable population are expected sometime next year.

The outline is designed to paint a broad-brush picture of the recovery, Capelli said. It doesn't go into great detail of what needs to happen on every

watershed. Instead, it discusses the larger requirements of unobstructed waterways, clean water and plenty of habitat. But it is the first official document that looks at the long road to recovery, which is likely to take decades. It is science-based and does not take social or political issues into consideration.

"There is no more equivocations about how to do it," said Russ Baggerly, chairman of the Casitas Municipal Water District board, who has been an outspoken advocate for the steelhead. "We have a document that gives us this really clear road map of how to bring back the fish."

David Pritchett, also an advocate, agreed.

"Now, instead of just being another environmental activist, we can point to the final document" for scientific backup, he said.

However, once the details of the outline are fleshed out, issues over certain parts of it are certain to be contentious.

Wisehart believes the guidelines on the number of steelhead expected to one day live in the Santa Clara River will be higher than what were historically there. She doesn't want undue restraints put on her agency if the goal is to restore more fish than are needed.

Southern California.

"We have to take care of the fish, you can't just ignore that," said Dana Wisehart, general manager of the United Water Conservation District. "But we have to find a way to balance it fairly so it doesn't destroy our agriculture and our industry here."

The changes the plan highlights in Ventura County include:

- Tearing down the Matilija Dam on the Ventura River.

- Finishing components of a fish passage around the Robles Diversion on the Ventura River.

- Approving a fish passage around the Freeman Diversion on the Santa Clara River.

- Evaluating and creating a fish passage around the Santa Felicia and Pyramid dams on Piru Creek.

The outline does not have

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"It's a laudable goal, but if the fish were never here in these numbers historically, it's not realistic," she said.

Also, the idea of putting a fish passage around the massive Santa Felicia dam is incompressible, she said.

But Paul Jenkin, the environmental director of the Ventura County Chapter of the Surfrider Foundation, said the plan's call for a new way of thinking about water use is needed.

"I don't think we can continue to see rivers drying up and fish stranded and dying," he said. "It's going to require some significant change in a lot of watersheds."