NW Eulachon: A Little Fish with a Big Problem

Local News

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SEATTLE - The Columbia River and seven others in Washington are part of a federal proposal to save a small forage

The eulachon is a type of smelt, native to the Northwest, which is a major food source for other fish and wildlife. The
Oceana
, explains what the designation means.

"It doesn't mean that it automatically becomes a sanctuary. What it means is, any federally authorized activity would u

NOAA lists numerous threats to eulachon in its proposal, including climate change, dams, dredging, and pollution. However, since the plan excludes the Pacific Ocean, it does not mention commercial fishing. Enticknap says trawling for pink shrimp off the coast also jeopardizes eulachon survival. He sees the NOAA plan as a good first step, but notes that eulachon spend most of their lives in the ocean, not the rivers.

"They're not proposing any marine waters to be designated as critical, which we think is a major shortcoming in this proposal. We think that they do have enough information to identify those areas."

NOAA's plan mentions the importance of near-shore habitat, because that's where the juvenile fish feed and grow, but says it does not have enough information about the eulachon's ocean distribution to protect its habitat there.

Background on the species and a link to the proposal can be found at www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/species/fish/pacificeulachon.htm. Comments about the plan can be made in writing to NOAA through March 7.