NOAA Report

April 8, 1991

Listing, Public Comment Processes to Begin

Sockeye Salmon May Be 'Endangered': NMFS

NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has announced a proposal to list the sockeye salmon on the Snake River as endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

A final decision on whether or not to list the stock will be based solely on the best scientific data available on the status of the sockeye, as required under the ESA. Under the ESA, socioeconomic considerations cannot affect NOAA's decision whether or not to list. NOAA has up to one year to determine if proposed listing will become final.

During this period between the proposal and any final decision to list, NOAA will employ the participation of a wide variety of interest groups, conservation organizations, academic and other government and private scientific agencies to ensure that the administrative record for the proposal will be accurate and complete.

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Five Biological Factors Considered

During a thorough scientific review of the species to see if it should be listed, five biological factors are considered:

1. the present or threatened destruction, modification, or curtailment of its habitat;
2. its overutilization for commercial, recreational, scientific or educational purposes;
3. disease or increase in predators;
4. inadequate existing regulatory processes;
5. other natural or man-made factors which affect its continued existence.

A species may be classified as endangered or threatened if only one of these five considerations is found to apply.

Chief Scientist Earle Visits Kuwait; Calls Trip to War Area 'Life Changing'

NOAA Chief Scientist Dr. Sylvia Earle was part of group of 80 government and business officials who visited Kuwait at the invitation of that country's ambassador last month. In an interview with **NOAA Report,** she called the trip "a life-changing experience. It's just that cradle of human civilization, that's all. Going to Antarctica was a life-changing experience in a positive way, but this was almost the opposite. What I saw in the Persian Gulf will stay with me for a very long time."

NOAA Report: *What was it like to be in Kuwait so soon after the war?*

Earle: Approaching Kuwait City, you see this cloud of gray. It appeared like smoke. It was a continuous blanket of gray for miles, and then we began to see these puffy little white clouds riding on top of this blanket of gray smoke. the little puffy white clouds were normal clouds, and the smoke was the soot-filled plume from the burning oil wells.

We had to cross over the oil fields to land in Kuwait. Kuwait City that day was bright and sunny, 75 degrees. All of us had been told it would be wise to wear jackets because it might be cool, but when we got off the plane, there were some grumbles. Soon after we arrived, we boarded buses and drove out to the burning fields—and then we knew why we had the jackets. The temperature dropped sharply under this heavy blanket of gray smoke. The flames were all around us, and you might think that that might make it warmer. Wrong—because it blotted out the sun and created this shield against its normal warming of the planet.

The temperature was about eight degrees cooler—you really felt it. But close to the columns of flame it was quite toasty. We could feel the searing heat. We didn't get very close to many of them. We were told not to get off the road because of the ordnance—land mines and such—that was still in the area. Later,

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Preliminary Findings on Oil Fire Effects

Federal Research Team Returns from Kuwait

Researchers from NOAA, along with other members of a Federal interagency team in Kuwait, have not found high concentrations of sulfur dioxide or hydrogen sulfide expected near the burning oil wells there, although only a limited assessment of the area was possible.

The team, made up of representatives from six federal agencies, recently returned from Kuwait where it assessed conditions by sampling the air and monitored oil fields. Their findings will help determine the effect the fires are having on public health. This data will also ascertain the extent of technical assistance needed in this region and the course of appropriate follow-up action.

More than 500 oil well, storage tank refinery fires are currently aflame in Kuwait. Each day these fires produce enormous amounts of smoke and other pollutants.

The team stressed that their findings were preliminary and that considerable follow-up will be necessary to evaluate definitively the nature and magnitude of the human health, ecological and atmospheric effects of the oil fires. Further studies were proposed for air monitoring, forecasting and health surveillance.

Federal agencies represented on the team are NOAA, EPA, Dept. of Health and Human Services, Dept. of Defense, Dept. of Energy and the U.S. Coast Guard.

Estuaries Chief Honored for Work With Hearing-Impaired Students, Employees

Henry Frey, chief of NOAA's estuarine and ocean physics branch, has won the Cooperative Education Associations Charles F. Kettering award for his work with hearing-impaired students.

The award, presented to Frey in Denver at the Associations annual conference, honored Frey's work in developing a program to integrate hearing-impaired students into his office. Many of the students Frey has hired attend Gallaudet University in Washington, which specializes in educating the hearing-impaired.

Frey commits regular work hours for his staff to receive sign language training and, in cases where proficiency in signing is crucial to job performance, requires staff members to include learning sign language in their performance objectives.

Frey has hired interpreters for meetings, training and special events, and in some cases has even made interpreters available for social events so that deaf employees can more easily participate in conversation.

Coming Events April 1991

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
7	8	9 Knauss Senate testimony on '92 budget	10	11 Knauss House testimony on satellites and weather modernization	12	13
14	15 Coastal Ocean Program workshop, in Washington.	16	17 Storm-Fest, an operations planning workshop on storm fronts, in Boulder, Co.	18	19	20

NMFS Proposes Listing Sockeye Salmon

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Also under the ESA, any final decision to list will include the preparation of a recovery plan for the sockeye. Although socioeconomic considerations may not affect NOAA's decision to list, incorporation of these factors may be appropriate within the implementation of the recovery plan itself.

In 1990, NMFS initiated a biological status review of the sockeye salmon stock in response to dramatic decreases in run sizes in recent years. Soon after initiating the review, NMFS received a petition to list the stock as endangered from the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes of the Fort Hill Reservation. The proposal to list comes after the year-long status review.

Although some biologists have speculated that the fish is already extinct because none apparently returned from the ocean last year, some year-classes may still be at sea. Due to the four to five to year cycle of spawning for the sockeye, it will not be known until 1994 whether this species is, in fact, extinct. Some Snake River sockeye, however, may return over the next three years.

At one time these fish were so abundant that native Americans and early miners depended on them for food in several locations within the Snake River Basin. Idaho's Redfish Lake's name was derived from the spawning colors of these fish. Last year, no fish were known to have succeeded in reaching the spawning areas, and in the preceding two years, only two redds (salmon nests) were found.

Public hearings on this listing proposal have been scheduled in Seattle, Portland, Ore., and Boise. The proposed listing also allows for a 60-day comment period ending June 2, 1991.

In June of last year, four other petitions were received to list additional Columbia River and Snake River salmon species as endangered. Decisions will be made later this year on whether to propose listing these species under the ESA.

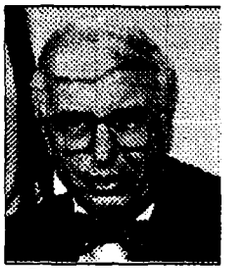
What Is the ESA, and How Can It Affect Salmon?

The ESA was passed by Congress in 1973 as one of the most far reaching conservation laws ever enacted. Congress acted in response to concerns over the growing numbers of animals and plants becoming extinct. Congress called endangered and threatened species of fish, wildlife and plants "of aesthetic, ecological, historical, recreational and scientific value to the Nation and its people," *said that such species should be protected and restored.* A listing as endangered means a species is "in danger of extinction," while "threatened" means the species is like to be endangered in the near future.

Through the recommendation of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), the Secretary of Commerce is responsible for determining whether a certain species of marine fish should be listed as endangered or threatened, acting on NMFS's recommendation. Anadromous fish such as salmon, which live in both fresh and salt water, are protected under the law.

Knauss is Elected IOC Vice-Chairman

NOAA Administrator John A. Knauss has been elected first vice-chairman of the United Nations' Intergov-ernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) at its 16th general assembly in Paris.



Dr. John A. Knauss

Knauss is the first American to be elected to office in the IOC's 31-year history. He said he would concentrate on coordinating the IOC's global ocean program with other U.N. bodies and non-governmental organizations.

Part of the IOC's global ocean work, he said, will involve setting up and promoting a global ocean observing system to collect and exchange data. Such information is expected to be used internationally in studies of climate change, marine pollution, and living marine resources.

The 117-member IOC is the coordinating organization within the U.N. for marine science and related activities. It meets biennially.

Earle Calls Kuwait Oil Fires 'A Terrible Experiment'

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when we went out to the highway where the exodus took place, there were live shells everywhere. Medium and large size—they were very conspicuous.

Did you have any trouble breathing in Kuwait because of the smoke?

Oh yes! You just did not want to take the next breath. We used masks, which helped some, but it's pretty disconcerting to wear a filter mask for any length of time. They're very constraining. But it did alleviate the stress that comes from inhaling that oily smoke.

How far outside of Kuwait City are the oil fields?

They're actually quite close, but the wind was blowing away from the city. So we didn't feel it much in the city itself. But sometimes, when the wind shifts, the city is...well, *dark*, really dark. We had to have the headlights on in the cars and buses before noon. When General Schwarzkopf said it was like going to the Gates of Hell...the description fits.

What was your role on the trip?

I took it as the representative from NOAA, and the only scientist in [a group of federal and business executives], to see if there were ways we might rebuild the environment. It's clear that the economy and the environment are connected. To build a business, you have to have a safe environment for people to live and work. You have to be able to breathe the air. And it's necessary to provide basic life support, like water and power.

You hear about the need for a healthy environment in order to have a prosperous lifestyle, and you get into a situation where you really can't breathe the air comfortably. First things first—you have to have a safe environment and those things that we all take for granted were not to be taken for granted in Kuwait. It's so fundamental that we consider it to be free.

It was a wonderful kind of example in a microcosm of what could be expected for the planet as a whole unless we take care of our natural resources, air being one of the them, a very fundamental one, and we will pay dearly if we don't put it back in shape.

How much of the spill did you get to see?

I was able, through our NOAA HAZMAT team, to visit with our Saudi counterparts and survey the spill in a government helicopter. We travelled

A championship diver, NOAA Chief Scientist Dr. Sylvia Earle travelled to Kuwait last month with business and federal officials.

offshore on the way up to Kuwait and followed the Saudi coastline from Sufaniya to Dharhan. When we were offshore, I looked out the window and thought, What's the problem? There's some patches of mousse, but if this is all there is, the system will rapidly recover. But the others who were aboard said, "Just wait, just wait." And they were right. Going back along the shore, south of Sufaniya, there were wide strips along certain beaches where the oil had actually come up over the beach berm during high tide, and had accumulated in vast lakes behind the beach. They were just stuck there. They may be there for geologic time. Sand covers it, and it hardens. But for now, it's just bays, lakes, rivers of oil.

Do you see it returning to normal any time soon?

It's a formidable challenge. Nature is wonderfully resilient. But the areas in good health are the source of restoration for this Persian Gulf, while the atmosphere that envelopes the planet is, relatively speaking, small. The view of an astronaut back to this planet is scary. What a thin shell surrounds us, and how precious it is. We ought to embrace it, realize this is the stuff of life itself, and do everything in our power to guard it.

But now, it has this wound, this black pall that's forming over the Gulf. I hope we can help.

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

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