

U.S. halts coho salmon protection

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The Bush administration has reportedly decided not to restore protection for coastal coho salmon that now number about 1-10th their historic population.

The administration, through the National Marine Fisheries Service, said it agrees with Oregon officials that the salmon is tough enough to do without federal protection from the Endangered Species Act, the Portland Oregonian reported Wednesday.

That means the salmon -- once a staple of coastal fishing fleets -- will remain in state hands, freeing loggers, farmers and other businesses from restrictions involved in federal protection, the newspaper said.

Opponents say a few years of favorable conditions at sea may be hiding underlying trouble for the species.

Proponents of the decision say it's a key achievement for the Oregon Plan for Salmon and Watersheds, an initiative that is designed to avoid federal rules by helping the salmon at a state level. The state, among other things, has restricted coho fishing and increased efforts to restore habitat.

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