

Staff Summary for February 12-13, 2025

7B. Department Director and Law Enforcement Division Reports

Today's Item

Information

Action

The Department will highlight items of note since the last Commission meeting,

Summary of Previous/Future Actions (N/A)

Background

Verbal reports are expected for the Department director's report and the Department Law Enforcement Division's report.

Significant Public Comments (N/A)

Recommendation (N/A)

Exhibits

1. [Department news release: "Endangered Southern California Steelhead Trout Rescued from Fire-Impacted Topanga Creek," dated February 4, 2025](#)

Motion (N/A)



CDFW NEWS

February 4, 2025

Media Contacts:

[Kyle Evans](#) (opens in new tab), CDFW Environmental Program Manager, (805) 794-9547

[Krysten Kellum](#) (opens in new tab), CDFW Communications, (916) 825-7120

Endangered Southern California Steelhead Trout Rescued from Fire-Impacted Topanga Creek



Temporary Relocation Will Safeguard the Last Santa Monica Mountains Population from Post-fire Storm Impacts

Media Note: A link to download photos and video is available [here](#).

Watch CDFW's video about the Topanga Creek steelhead trout rescue at <https://youtu.be/eAaDjKPg7D4>.

As part of statewide efforts to help Californians and wildlife recover from the Southern California fires, on Jan. 23 the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) and its partners rescued 271 endangered Southern California steelhead trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) from Topanga Creek, the last known population of this species in the Santa Monica Mountains.

These fish survived in the chilly waters of Topanga Creek as the Palisades Fire swept through Topanga Canyon, but rain brought the threat of localized extinction. Storm events in late January and future storms falling over the burn scar can carry ash, sediment and debris into the creek that would suffocate and wipe out the population. Fisheries biologists estimate the remaining population to be as few as 400 - 500 trout.

“The fires in Southern California have been incredibly devastating,” said CDFW Chief Deputy Director Valerie Termini. “CDFW stands with the victims who have lost their homes, and we’re here to help everyone recover. Part of that effort is to bring back habitats and wildlife. Our role is going to be for the long term — helping people and wildlife recover.

“People in California want to live where biodiversity is thriving,” added Termini. “It’s important for California, and it’s important for our wildlife.”

With the help of teams from the Resource Conservation District of the Santa Monica Mountains, California Conservation Corps, Watershed Stewards Program, Cachuma Operation and Maintenance Board, and California State Parks, CDFW staff set out Jan. 23 to ensure the steelhead survive. Equipped with backpack electrofishers, nets and buckets, the trout were captured from the creek and relocated to CDFW’s nearby Fillmore Fish Hatchery to prevent a likely mortality event during the rains. There, they will be held in a specially designated area of the hatchery that is set aside for the conservation of imperiled fish until it is safe to be returned to their home waters or another suitable creek in the area. Most of the netted fish were no bigger than 12 inches in length.

“Southern California steelhead are critically endangered within the Santa Monica Mountains,” said CDFW Environmental Program Manager Kyle Evans. “Topanga Creek is their only remaining population, when historically trout were found in streams across the Los Angeles area.

“These fish are incredible. They are adapted to drier summers and warmer water temperatures; they have a really complex life where they can either stay in the creek

their whole life or go to the ocean and come back,” added Evans. “They're a very adaptable, important, iconic species whose success represents a healthy watershed, and healthy watersheds mean better water quality for us all. Protecting this population and their home habitats isn't just good for the trout, it benefits the Californians of this community and beyond.”

In addition to this one-day operation to rescue the population of critically endangered fish, CDFW is working alongside California's resource agencies to support state fire response and recovery efforts following the Southern California fires. CDFW staff are working to rescue and relocate animals impacted or displaced by the fires and are supporting and monitoring intake of injured wildlife to licensed wildlife rehabilitators.

As climate disruption continues to impact California residents, CDFW is working to help California be more resilient. Since 2021, CDFW's Wildfire Resiliency Initiative has increased the pace and scale of vegetation management activities on its 1.1 million acres of state lands. Fire fuels reduction has been implemented on more than 100,000 acres annually across 90 high fire-risk lands statewide, providing protection to disadvantaged communities and adjacent natural lands.

Advances in veterinary medical science have come as a result of CDFW's work in collaboration with the UC Davis School of Veterinary Medicine — the application of fish skin to treat animal burn victims, first used in North America on bears and a mountain lion injured in a 2017 wildfire and today on animal burn patients around the world.

CDFW's work in wildlife science has helped save rare populations of animals during fires, floods and drought. In 2020, mountain yellow-legged frog tadpoles were pulled out of the blackened landscape of a 116,000-acre wildfire, where most breeding pools were destroyed by charred rubble. CDFW supported efforts to help riparian brush rabbits to higher ground during 2023 flooding events. Salmon spawning and rearing habitats have been restored in drought-impacted creeks and streams across California.

These advances not only support the species themselves, but the Californians living near and benefitting from healthy, biodiverse habitats.

###