

STATE OF CALIFORNIA
NATURAL RESOURCES AGENCY
DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

STEELHEAD REPORT AND RESTORATION CARD PROGRAM

Report to the Legislature 2022-2023



March 2025

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of the California Department of Fish and Wildlife's (Department) Steelhead Report and Restoration Card (Report Card) is to gather angler data to support the Department's responsibility to manage steelhead populations and fisheries. Revenue generated from Report Card sales is dedicated to administering the Steelhead Trout Report and Restoration Card Program (Program) and funding projects that contribute to the conservation, monitoring, or recovery of steelhead populations. This report summarizes Program activities for the 2022 and 2023 Report Card and Fiscal Years (FY).

For the 2022 and 2023 Report Card years a total of 92,767 cards were sold to 66,359 individual anglers, generating \$794,365 in revenue. The Program had an operating budget of \$1,227,291 for the 2022 and 2023 FYs combined. This included \$500,000 of increased spending authority for FY 2023 to fund three steelhead centric creel surveys throughout the state. Of the \$1,227,291 operating budget, \$200,000 was dedicated to administrative costs for the Program and \$1,027,291 was dedicated to fund on-going projects that directly or indirectly benefited steelhead populations. All unspent funds were transferred to the Steelhead Trout account within the Fish and Game Preservation Fund (FGPF). Those reserve funds are made available to the Program in future years to aid in funding projects that may have larger operating budgets or higher cost projects that require multiple years to complete.

Although anglers are mandated by law to return their Report Cards by January 31, only a small percentage (32.2%) of cards were returned. The trend of low Report Card returns is consistent with the previous five-year average of 35.5%. The majority of cards returned by anglers were reported as "did not fish" (58.6%). Report Cards returned by anglers that contain incomplete or missing information are considered incomplete and not included in any reports published by the Department. Less than half of Report Cards returned contained fishing effort and had all data fields filled out correctly (36.7%).

The detail of the Program is outlined in the 2025 California Fish and Game Code in Division 6, Part 2, Chapter 2, Article 6. Steelhead Trout (Sections 7380-7382), which states that the Program shall remain in effect until January 1, 2027, after which it is repealed. The Department recommends that Article 6. Steelhead Trout [7380-7382] remain operative.

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INTRODUCTION

Pursuant to state legislation (AB 2187), the California Fish and Game Commission implemented the Steelhead Trout Report and Restoration Card Program (Program) in 1991. Assembly Bill 2187 established Fish and Game Code Sections 7380 and 7381 requiring anglers fishing for steelhead in anadromous waters to purchase a Steelhead Report and Restoration Card (Report Card), record their fishing information, and return their catch information to the Department during the designated reporting period, January 1 through 31 of the following calendar year. Report Card data is collected by calendar year, from January 1 to December 31st. Anglers are required to record the date and location where they are fishing, any steelhead kept or released, as well as the number of hours fished. For purposes of these regulations, a steelhead is defined as any Rainbow Trout greater than 16 inches in length found in anadromous waters (Cal. Code Regs. Tit. 14, § 5.88). See Appendix A, Figures A1 & A2, for an example of the report card and map of location codes.

Section 7381 states that revenue generated from the sale of the Report Card may be expended only to monitor, restore, or enhance steelhead trout resources and to administer the Program. Eligible project types include enforcement and protection, fish passage at stream crossings, instream barrier modification for fish passage, instream habitat restoration, riparian restoration, instream bank stabilization, monitoring status and trends, monitoring watershed restoration, project design, watershed evaluation, fish screening at diversions, private sector technical training, water conservation measures, and water measuring devices.

Section 7381 requires the Department to submit a report to the Legislature regarding projects undertaken funded by the Program, derived benefits of funded restoration projects, and its recommendations for revising the Report Card requirement, if any. This report summarizes Program revenue and activities for Fiscal Years (FY) 2022 and 2023.

STEELHEAD STATUS

Anadromous Rainbow Trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*), otherwise known as steelhead, are an important ceremonial, biological, economical, and recreational resource throughout the western Pacific states. Within California, steelhead populations range from the Oregon border south to Baja California. Despite being widespread, most populations within California are declining (61 FR 41541; Moyle 2002).

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) organizes species into management units for the purpose of listing or delisting fishes under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA). The management unit for steelhead is the Distinct Population Segment (DPS) which groups populations that are substantially reproductively isolated from other populations and represent an important component in the evolutionary legacy of the species (56 FR 58612). There are six steelhead DPSs in California—Northern California (65 FR 36074), Central California Coast (62 FR 43937), Central Valley (63 FR 13347), and South-Central California Coast (62 FR 43937) are listed as threatened under the ESA and the Southern

California DPS (62 FR 43937) is listed as endangered (Figure 1). The Klamath Mountains Province DPS is the only steelhead DPS in California that is not warranted for federal listing (71 FR 834).

In addition to federal ESA listings, the Northern California summer steelhead (NCSS) and Southern California steelhead DPS's are listed as endangered under the California Endangered Species Act (CESA). In contrast to findings by NMFS (85 FR 6527), the California Fish and Game Commission listed NCSS in 2022 (FGC 2022). This decision was based on the determination that NCSS qualifies as a subspecies, as specified in CESA sections 2062 and 2067, given the unique genetic markers of the summer-run ecotype within the Northern California DPS. Southern California steelhead was listed under CESA in 2024, providing additional protections for the ESA listed DPS.

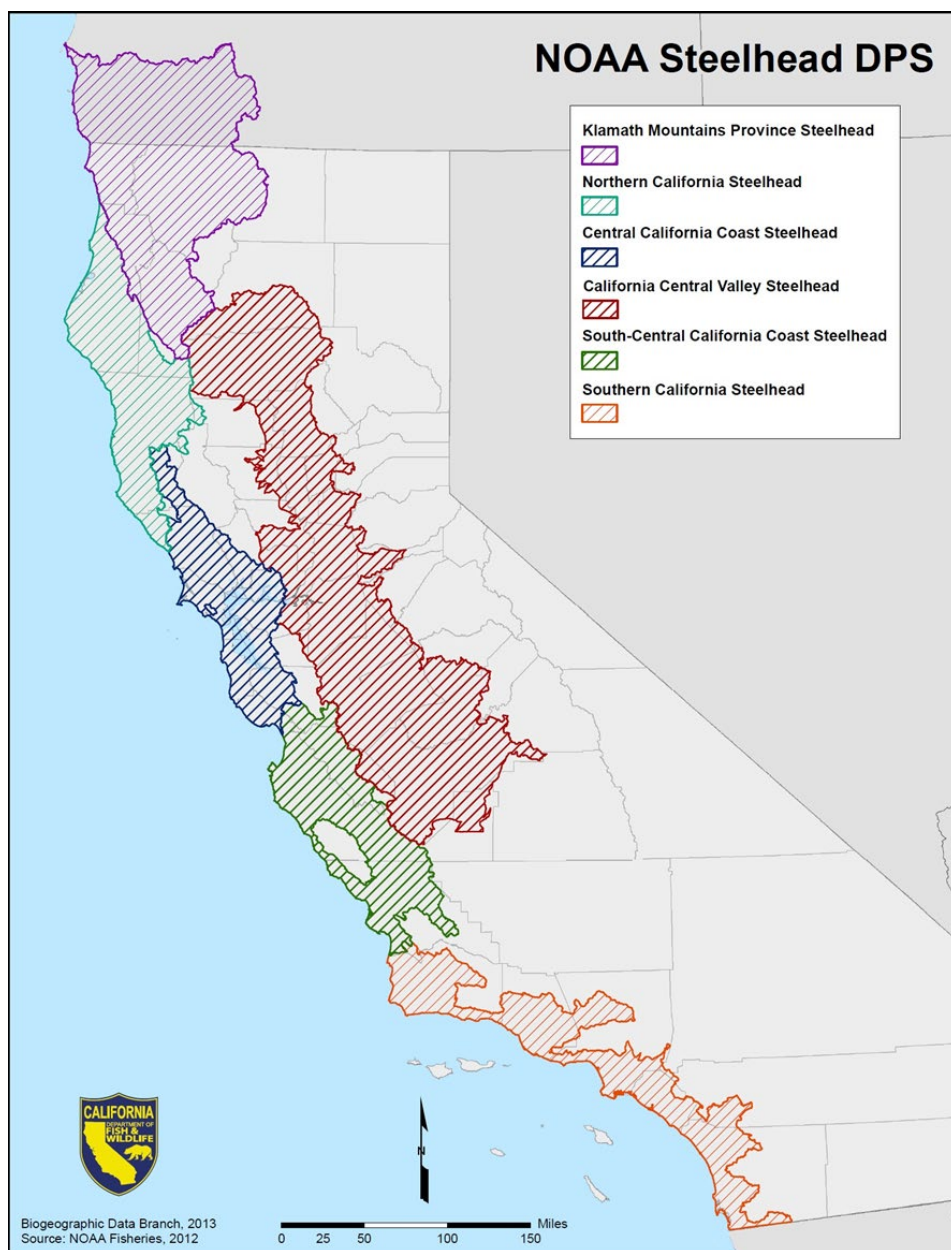


Figure 1. Steelhead distinct population segments within California as delineated by the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration.

REPORT CARD RETURNS

The quantity and quality of the steelhead catch-and-harvest data the Department gains from the Report Card is dependent on anglers returning their cards. Although anglers are mandated by law to return their angling data by January 31 of the following year, only a small percentage of anglers comply with this requirement (approximately 32%). For the 2022 and 2023 Report Card years a total of 92,767 Report Cards were sold, and 29,839 Report Cards were returned to the Department (Table 1). The annual number of Report Cards sold were 48,994 in 2022 and 43,773 in 2023, averaging 46,384, which is a slight decrease compared to the previous five-year average of approximately 50,226 cards. Of all returned Report Cards, 88.1% were returned online, which is an increase from the previous five-year average of 82.7%. The majority of cards returned by anglers were reported as “did not fish” (58.6%). Report Cards returned by anglers that contain incomplete or missing information are considered incomplete and are not included in any reports published by the Department. Less than half of Report Cards returned contained fishing effort and had all data fields filled out correctly (36.7%) (Table 1).

Table 1 field names are explained below for reference.

- **Year:** calendar year for which Report Card was valid
- **Sold:** number of Report Cards sold to anglers
- **Returned:** number of Report Cards returned by anglers
- **No Effort:** number of anglers reporting ‘did not fish’
- **Effort:** number of returned Report Cards with fishing effort
- **Incomplete:** number of returned Report Cards with fishing effort containing incomplete data
- **Complete:** number of returned Report Cards with fishing effort that were correctly completed and used in data analysis

Table 1. Total number of Report Cards sold and returned to the Department for the 2022 and 2023 Report Card Years.

Year	Sold	Returned	No Effort	Effort	Incomplete	Complete
2022	48,994	15,371	8991	6,380	761	5,619
2023	43,773	14,468	8,500	5,968	631	5,337
Total	92,767	29,839	17,491	12,348	1,392	10,956

REPORT CARD PROGRAM REVENUE AND SPENDING

All revenue generated from the sale of Report Cards is deposited directly into the Steelhead Trout account within the Fish and Game Preservation Fund (FGPF). The Program is authorized to spend a maximum (not to exceed) amount of the annual revenue referred to as spending authority. Spending authority fluctuates from year-to-year due to variations in Report Card sales, revenue, and the balance of the FGPF. All revenue in exceedance of the annual spending authority will remain in the account as a reserve balance. In addition, all unspent funds from the Program's annual spending authority are transferred into the reserve balance. The reserve balance is available to the Program in future years with approval from Legislature for increased spending authority.

In review of the Program's reserve fund balance, the Department was approved for an increase of \$500,000 in annual spending authority starting in FY 2023. These funds were requested to specifically support steelhead-centric angler (creel) surveys on the Mad River, Russian River, and south-central coast streams.

The annual cost of a Report Card for FY 2022 was \$7.75 and increased to \$8.50 in FY 2023. The cost of the Report Card adjusts in response to the Implicit Price Deflator (IPD) which measures economic inflation experienced by consumers. Fluctuation of the IPD accounts for why Program revenue may increase when Report Card sales have not.

Report Cards sold for FYs 2022 and 2023 Report Card years generated \$405,478.65 and \$388,886.47 respectively, totaling \$794,365.12 in revenue. The annual spending authority of the Program for FYs 2022 and 2023 was \$390,344 and \$836,947, respectively, totaling a combined spending authority of \$1,227,291 for both FYs.

For FYs 2022 and 2023 the Program dedicated \$200,000 for administrative costs for the Program and dedicated \$1,027,291 to projects that directly or indirectly benefited steelhead populations (Table 2). All projects that receive funding via the Program are required to address direct or indirect benefits to steelhead populations. At the end of each FY, any unspent funds revert to the Steelhead Trout account within the FGPF.

The Program may use Report Card Revenue to fund both internal Department and external partner projects. For external projects, funds from the current FY operating budget can be encumbered for up to two additional years. The encumbrance process allows the Program the flexibility to fund projects over multiple years from a single FY and fund higher cost projects that require multiple years to complete.

Table 2. Report Card Program budgets for FYs 2022 and 2023. External projects are notated with (E) and internal projects with (I).

FY 2022	Amount
Administrative Costs (I)	\$100,000
Steelhead Centric Creel Surveys (I)	\$105,000
Fisheries Restoration Projects / Other (E)	\$185,344
Total	\$390,344
FY 2023	Amount
Administrative Costs (I)	\$100,000
Steelhead Centric Creel Surveys (I)	\$550,000
Fisheries Restoration Projects / Other (E)	\$186,947
Total	\$836,947
Grand Total	\$1,227,291

BENEFITS OF THE REPORT CARD PROGRAM

The Program provides the Department with information to aid in making fisheries management and regulatory decisions for steelhead populations and fisheries. By purchasing a Report Card and participating in the reporting process, steelhead anglers directly influence the way in which steelhead resources of the state are managed.

For example, analysis of Report Card data has been used to show that hatchery origin (HO) steelhead stray into rivers managed as wild origin (WO) streams absent of hatchery operations. To reduce the deleterious effect of hatchery genetics on wild populations, stream-specific take limits were standardized, increasing daily bag and possession limits of HO steelhead, state-wide. Report Card data may also aid in the development of Hatchery Genetic Management Plans (HGMP's) and Fisheries Management Evaluation Plans (FMEP's). The Program makes historical data available to state and federal agencies, non-government agencies, and the general public. Requests for Report Card data can be submitted directly to the Program coordinator, or through a formal request for public records.

Prior to the implementation of the Program in 1993, steelhead seldom received funding for habitat restoration and monitoring projects contributing to the conservation and recovery of the species. Program revenue is dedicated, in part, to funding steelhead-centric restoration projects throughout California (Table 3).

Report Card revenue has been used to fund:

- Modification and removal of barriers, improving fish passage.
- Screening of diversions, protecting emigrating juvenile steelhead.
- Restoration of instream habitat, including the addition of large-woody structures, resulting in the sorting of spawning gravels, stabilization of stream banks, and increasing the frequency and depth of pools.
- Stabilization of eroding stream banks.
- Monitoring of individual populations, providing baseline and trend data to assist recovery efforts.
- Watershed education to the public and school districts.

Table 3. Projects and allocations for FYs 2022 and 2023. External projects are notated with (E) and internal projects with (I).

FY 2022	Amount
Bradley (Ringer) Cachagua Creek Fish Passage Project (E)	\$160,000
Mad River Steelhead Centric Creel Survey (I)	\$102,129
Total	\$262,129
FY 2023	Amount
Little Van Duzen Habitat Design Project (E)	\$40,000
North Fork Mad River Instream Salmonid Habitat Improvement Design Project (E)	\$40,000
Mad River Steelhead Centric Creel Survey (I)	\$102,129
South Central Coast Steelhead Centric Creel Survey (I)	\$145,325
Russian River Steelhead Centric Creel Survey (I)	\$291,650
Total	\$619,104
Grand Total	\$881,233

PROGRAM UPDATES

Seasonal Reports

To enhance the utility and transparency of Report Card data and streamline reporting, all summarized angling data will now be available in the new Steelhead Report Card Seasonal Angling Reports (Seasonal Reports), accessible on the Report Card website. These reports expand on the data traditionally included in Legislative Reports, offering higher resolution catch and effort data for each location code and for the season as a whole. Data is now reported on a seasonal basis, covering the entire traditional steelhead fishing season (June-May), which spans two Report Card years. This new reporting format is expected to provide deeper insights into steelhead trends by fishing season or individual cohorts.

Data Dashboard

The Steelhead Report Card Data Dashboard (Dashboard) is another new tool designed to provide an interactive experience for anglers and the public as whole. Like Seasonal Reports, the Dashboard displays data on a June-May basis so users can capture trends by individual steelhead seasons rather than Report Card years. Some features include: a location code map, filtering options for specific fishing locations, months, and years, wild and hatchery catch, as well as hatchery harvest, average number of steelhead caught per trip, and additional effort trends. The Dashboard can be found on the Report Card website.

Steelhead Centric Creel Surveys

The Program is currently funding steelhead centric creel surveys on the Mad River, Russian River, and south-central coast streams in Monterey and San Luis Obispo counties. These creels surveys will provide critical catch and effort data to inform regional and statewide steelhead management strategies. Additionally, creel surveys may provide an opportunity to compare effort data reported via in-person survey to effort reported via Report Cards. Creel surveys are currently slated to run through FY 2026.

New Publications

Gusman-Costa, and Hause (2023) analyzed trends in angler demographics in relation to annual Report Card return rates and online reporting rates during the 2012–2019 study period. They also examined whether certain demographic or behavioral factors influence the likelihood of anglers returning their Report Cards. The complete publication is available on the Report Card website.

PROGRAM CONSIDERATIONS

The Department continues to coordinate with the Steelhead Subcommittee of the California Advisory Committee on Salmon and Steelhead Trout, as outlined in California Fish and Game Code I Division 6, Part 1, Chapter 8, Article 3. Salmon, Steelhead Trout, and Anadromous Fisheries Program (Section 6920). Moving forward, the Department and Steelhead Subcommittee will evaluate and consider the following actions to potentially improve the Program:

- Evaluation of angler nonresponse and low Report Card return rates.
- The development of a mobile Report Card application with real-time data collection.
- Review of Report Card location codes to evaluate the most appropriate geographic boundaries for data collection.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The status of the Program is outlined in the 2025 California Fish and Game Code in Division 6, Part 2, Chapter 2, Article 6. Steelhead Trout (Sections 7380-7382), which states that the Program shall remain in effect only until January 1, 2027, and as of that date is repealed. The Department recommends Article 6. Steelhead Trout [7380-7382] remain operative.

LITERATURE CITED

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- Moyle, P. B. 2002. Inland Fishes of California. University of California Press.

APPENDICES

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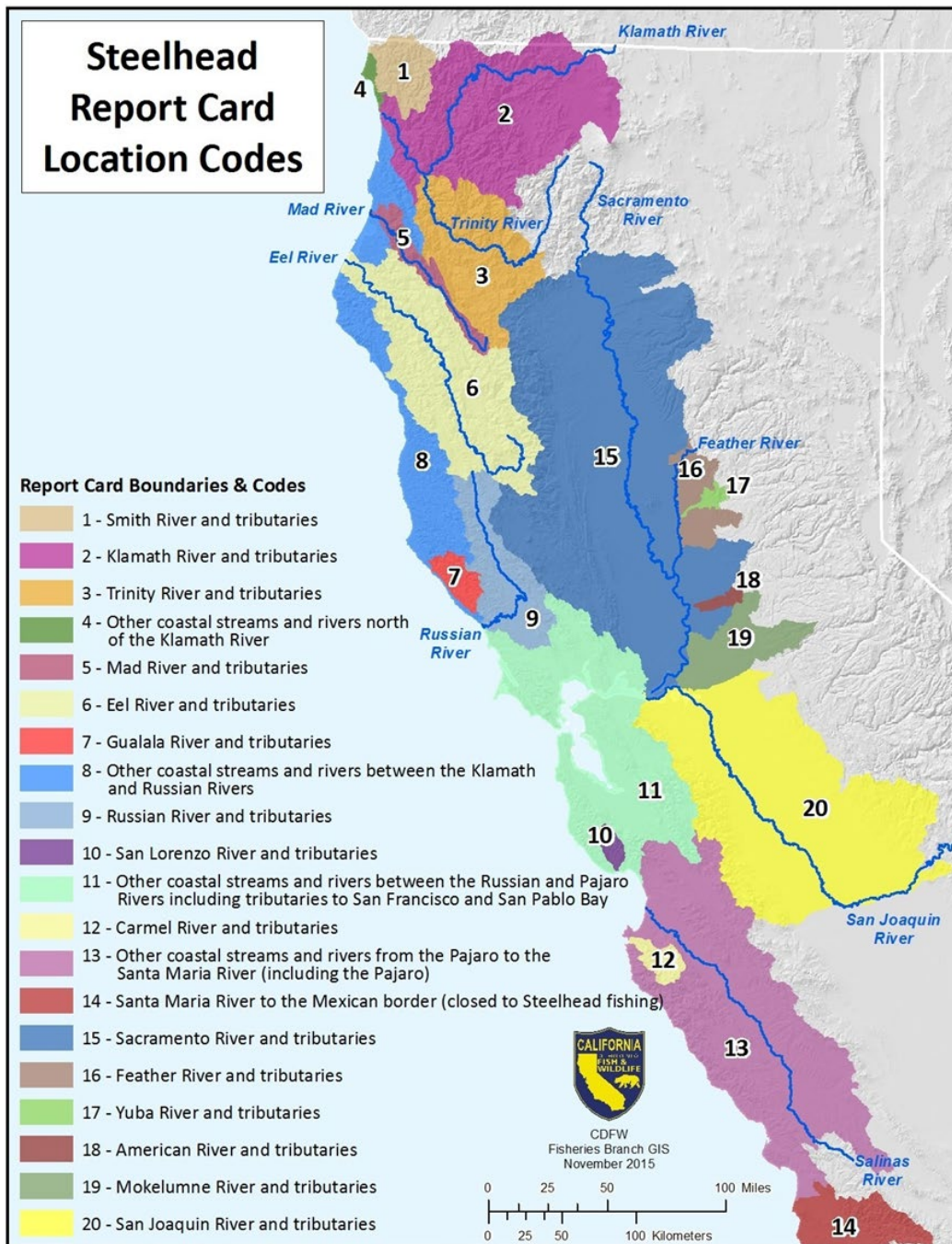


Figure A2. Spatial representation and description of Report Card location codes.