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BLM completes fish ladder to boost salmon, steelhead

■ **Fishery:** The project replaces a makeshift aluminum structure.

By LANCE ROBERTSON

The Register-Guard

HORTON — A recently completed fish ladder in the Coast Range near Horton will open up more than a dozen miles of Lake Creek to migrating salmon and steelhead.

The \$250,000 U.S. Bureau of Land Management project allows fish to get to and beyond Hult Pond, a 60-acre human-made reservoir the agency acquired in 1994 from Willamette Industries.

It opens up miles and miles of spawning and rearing habitat for coho salmon and steelhead, two migrating fish species that are dwindling in numbers along the entire West Coast.

The concrete ladder also is part of the BLM's overall effort to improve fish runs on Lake Creek, a tributary of the Stuslaw River and a

prime spawning stream for salmon.

A larger fish ladder downstream, at a series of falls, was built in 1989, opening up more than 100 miles of habitat for the fish.

The new ladder at Hult Pond, about 25 miles northwest of Eugene, replaces a makeshift aluminum passage that never worked well because it was too steep, said Leo Poole, fish biologist for the Eugene District of the BLM.

It was constructed during the summer under the Jobs in the Woods program, which employs displaced timber workers as part of President Clinton's Northwest forest plan initiative.

Salmon and steelhead were cut off from the upper reaches of Lake Creek earlier this century, when an earthen dam was built to store logs for a sawmill previously owned by the Hult Lumber Co.

The sawmill's now gone. Willamette Industries, which acquired the pond and surrounding land when it bought Bohemia Inc. in the early 1990s, handed over the reservoir and 2,850 acres to the

BLM in the 1994 land swap. The BLM gave Willamette 2,760 acres in the deal.

"Lake Creek is very important," Poole said. "Historically, there used to be large (salmon) runs here."

The portions of Lake Creek above the pond can help rebuild coho populations in the Stuslaw River system, he said.

"I find this upper watershed very important for coho juveniles," Poole said. "If you look at the big picture, habitat is limited for spawning. This (fish ladder) is a prime piece of the puzzle" for restoring fish runs.

Coho are just moving into the upper reaches of Lake Creek; steelhead should move in sometime in December, Poole said.

Meanwhile, the BLM is about to launch a major study of the Hult Pond area's recreational potential.

The agency has envisioned some kind of campground at the lake for years, but hasn't had the money or an overall plan for the area, said Doug Huntington, spokesman for the BLM's Eugene District.