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Protection sought for Coho salmon

Native strains of Coho salmon should be declared an endangered species, the Santa Cruz County Fish and Game Commission decided last night.

The commission voted 5-3 to send a petition to the state Fish and Game Commission asking for action. If the state commission accepts the county request, a one-year study of the fish will be undertaken to determine how best to save the species and whether it should be listed as an endangered or just a threatened species.

The native salmon used to be common in streams and rivers throughout Santa Cruz County,

but over the past two decades they have disappeared from all but Scott and Waddell creeks on the county's north coast.

Landowners along the creeks don't like the idea of declaring the fish endangered. An endangered-species declaration could limit farming, timbering and other development, county officials said.

Bud McCrary, of Big Creek Timber, said the private sector could do a better job protecting the salmon habitat than governmental agencies.

He said property owners fear that more governmental controls will put many of them out of business.

Biologists have said that salmon populations have been dropping dramatically in the past few years along the Pacific Coast and native fish have all but disappeared from Santa Cruz County streams.

Only one female native Coho salmon was found this spring in Scott Creek. It was recovered for spawning in the Monterey Bay Salmon and Trout project hatchery in Swanton.

Fifteen mature Cohos were found in Waddell Creek — half of them females. But the egg nest of one of the females was washed away by torrential rains this spring.