

✓ FISH & FISHING

North Coast creeks may close to salmon fishing

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SANTA CRUZ — A decision on whether to seek endangered-species status for local coho salmon was put off until May by the Fish and Game Commission Thursday.

Salmon fishing in Scott and Waddell creeks, however, may be banned by the state today at the request of the local commission in an attempt to protect the last of the native fish.

Commissioners decided to delay further discussion on the endangered-species proposal while they wait to see if enough winter rain comes, to enable the fish to come back on their own, and whether other, less controversial measures can help save the native cohos.

The local coho, or silver salmon, is found only in Scott and Waddell creeks. Native fish are genetically pure fish that have not crossbred with other stream stocks.

Their survival has been imperiled by five years of drought, which has cut recent spawning runs to only a few fish. To protect the fish and stream flows, the county has proposed that the cohos be declared an endangered species by the state.

The proposal has been strongly opposed by North Coast landowners, farmers and businessmen who fear it will give local government too much power over water rights and land use in the Waddell and Scott creek areas. It could also affect commercial and sport salmon fishing in the Monterey Bay Area.

Last month, after a heated public hearing, the commission vote tied at 4-4 on whether to forward the proposal to the state. Thursday night commissioners were to reconsider the proposal, but backed off after little discussion.

One proposal brought up by the commission was whether to seek a

ban on all fishing, for both steelhead and salmon, in the two creeks. Concern was raised that salmon could be killed when caught by steelhead fishermen.

Keith Anderson of the state Department of Fish and Game told the commissioners Thursday that he doubted the state will agree to ban all fishing in the streams, but expected it would endorse a ban on the taking of salmon.

Rick Peretto, chairman of the Monterey Bay Salmon and Trout Project, also spoke against a steelhead fishing ban, saying that it would put the trout project out of business by discouraging volunteers. Most project volunteers are fishermen who help to raise the steelhead, in part to ensure they have a good recreational fishery.

The Salmon and Trout Project plants thousands of fish in local streams each year, and is credited with enabling the cohos to survive thus far.