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January 6, 2016

Governor Kate Brown
State Capitol Building
900 Court Street NE, 160
Salem, Oregon 97301

Dear Governor Brown,

The Oregon League of Conservation Voters has serious concerns about the recent action of the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission to block the implementation of a bi-state plan to reform the management of non-tribal salmon fisheries on the lower Columbia River. We thank you for being a friend and supporter of OLCV and the environmental community, and we respectfully urge you to advise your Commission to ensure the plan is faithfully implemented. Our hope is to prevent both a further erosion of public confidence in ODFW's management and a potential conflict with the State of Washington over the management of Columbia River fisheries.

As you know, the phased-in Columbia River fishery reform plan was adopted in 2012 by both the Oregon and Washington fish and wildlife commissions to improve the conservation of wild and endangered salmonids – as well as other non-target fish and wildlife species – by increasing the selectivity of commercial and recreational salmon fisheries. Due to concerns about bycatch and the inability of gillnets to fish selectively, the reform plan included provisions to restrict gillnets to enhanced off-channel, terminal fishing areas and transition to alternative, selective commercial fishing gears for mainstem fisheries. Additionally, the recreational fishing community had to commit to their share of conservation measures. Every angler on the Columbia River and its tributaries was required to move to barbless hooks, stop fishing in traditional popular areas, and pay more in funds to protect the commercial fishing industry from any possible economic harm.

Unfortunately, the Oregon Commission's decision to roll back the policies appear more motivated by a desire to significantly enhance the economic performance of the gillnet industry – an alarming approach that increases the prospects for a conflict between the two states. On Jan. 14th, we believe the Washington Commission will vote to use adaptive management to make adjustments to the plan while still honoring the two-state agreement. If Oregon continues to go a different route, management of the Columbia River between Oregon and Washington could end up in years of litigation.

Conservation, sportfishing, and commercial interest groups worked with legislators in 2013 to pass Senate Bill 830, the enabling legislation for the joint state agreement. Not everyone agreed with the legislation and legislative leadership had to broker several deals to gain passage; but in the end, lawmakers on both sides of the aisle voted to support the

agreement. This agreement took months of work, and the conservation community ended up opposing its own ballot measure that would have entirely banned the practice of gillnetting. Since the reforms were implemented, both the commercial and recreational industries benefited economically – although some interests would like much more. In our view, the Columbia River reforms have provided an alternative from the “us versus them” discussion and more about how we get manage the river for the benefit of all.

OLCV respectfully requests that you recommend to your Commission that they follow through with the intent and spirit of Senate Bill 830, stop the pause in the reforms, and implement the compromise agreement in 2017. In our view, the Commission is using adaptive management beyond the legislature’s intention in Senate Bill 830. The intent of adaptive management, and its appropriate use, is to meet the conservation and economic goals in the Joint State Agreement in order to keep Oregon and Washington management in the Columbia River concurrent, not benefit one industry at the expense of another, or at the expense of conservation.

On behalf of our thousands of members across Oregon, we are very grateful for your leadership on these important natural resource issues. Thank you for your leadership on this critical issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'DM', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Doug Moore
Executive Director