

Will be sent individually to: Senate Commerce Committee
NW Senators
Senate Leadership

As representatives of Pacific Northwest businesses and Trade Associations that depend on healthy fish runs for our livelihoods, we are writing to express our support for the expeditious passage of SB 3119, the Endangered Salmon and Fisheries Predation Prevention Act. This is a companion to HR 2083 which recently passed the House with strong bipartisan support. This legislation represents a common-sense solution to a growing conservation crisis that threatens the future of fish runs in the Columbia Basin and the businesses that depend on these runs.

The Columbia basin is renowned throughout the world for its runs of salmon, steelhead, and sturgeon. Each year, sport fishing contributes over \$600 million to the economies in the Columbia Basin. Unfortunately, many of the wild runs are severely depleted from historical levels and are currently listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The region is investing billions in recovering these runs and our industry has willingly taken our share of the hurt in the form of lost fishery opportunity. These region-wide efforts are being put at risk by the ever-increasing presence and predation of sea lions at migratory bottlenecks in the lower Columbia River. This is a learned behavior by a very small fraction (.06 percent) of the overall sea lion population. We know this is learned because 20 years ago, we did not have this problem.

Predation by sea lions has already led to the extinction of winter steelhead at Ballard Locks in Washington in the 1990's. In the Columbia Basin, sea lions are now preying on multiple fish runs at locations where they are most vulnerable, and the majority of this predation is not occurring at dams. They are eating up to 43% of the Spring Chinook that enter the Columbia River. They are eating at least 25% of the winter steelhead in the Willamette River. There is a nearly 90% chance that at least one of these winter steelhead runs will go extinct if action is not taken. Sea lions are beginning to decimate the large, old growth sturgeon. Sea lions are also spreading into other river systems in the basins, systems that currently support healthy fish runs. This is all occurring over 100 miles from the ocean, in areas where sea lions have not historically foraged.

Every other activity that has a measurable impact on salmon and sturgeon populations is currently regulated to help recover these fish: sport, commercial and tribal fisheries; land and water practices; hydro practices; hatchery practices and more. In some places, such as the Willamette River Basin, our efforts to restore steelhead and salmon are being erased by sea lions consuming large numbers of the steelhead and chinook! Healthy sea lion populations should not be exempt from management. It makes no sense to apply the same level of protections to sea lions when they number 300 000 as when they numbered 75 000. The spectacular success of the Marine Mammal Protection Act should not be a path to extinction for salmon and steelhead.

We must protect our iconic salmon and steelhead and we would be deeply grateful for your support in moving to pass this legislation. We cannot thank you enough for your support on this issue.

Sincerely,

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