

There is a conservation crisis occurring in the Columbia basin.

Sea lion populations have rebounded thanks to the MMPA. Now a small proportion of male sea lions are swimming 100+ miles inland to prey on ESA listed salmon and steelhead as well as sturgeon and lamprey.

Federal, State, and Tribal managers have been unable to prevent this because of restrictions under MMPA.



*“Predation by sea lions is threatening to undo the work of the past two decades and billions of dollars of investment in salmon recovery.”*


# COLUMBIA BASIN | IMPERILED FISH

Predation by sea lions at Willamette Falls and in the Columbia River below Bonneville dam is placing some fish runs at high risk of extinction

## Willamette River Edging toward extinction


 Winter Steelhead  
**4**  
Populations

 Sea lions  
**40+**  
Near Willamette Falls


 Fish  
**25%**  
Eaten


 Probability  
**89%**  
of Extinction

## Columbia River Unsustainable losses

 Spring Chinook  
**34**  
Populations







 Sea lions  
**~200**  
Near Bonneville Dam

 Up to  
**45%**  
Fish Eaten

 Probability  
**?**  
of Extinction



In just 20+ years in the Columbia Basin, sea lions have expanded to threaten more fish populations in more locations for more of the year. The management allowed under MMPA has failed to prevent this conservation crisis. It's time for a change

Then	Now
 <p>Locations <b>1</b> Impacted</p>	 <p>Locations <b>8</b> Impacted</p>
 <p>Months Present <b>3</b> Per Year</p>	 <p>Months Present <b>10</b> Per Year</p>
 <p>Fish Populations <b>34</b> Imperiled</p>	 <p>Fish Populations <b>59</b> Imperiled</p>



This bill modifies section 120 of the MMPA to provide state and tribal managers the flexibility to proactively remove sea lions that are preying on vulnerable sturgeon, lamprey, and ESA listed salmon and steelhead.

It does this by allowing managers to apply for a permit to remove sea lions that are either 112 miles upriver from the ocean or in the spawning tributaries for ESA listed salmon/steelhead in the Columbia River

These are the areas where research has shown the sea lions diet is 99% ESA listed salmon and steelhead, sturgeon, or lamprey

SB 3119 ensures the conservation integrity of the MMPA is retained by maintaining strict oversight

- NOAA reviews any permit applications and issues a request for public comment.
- NOAA forms a public taskforce to review the application and make recommendations
- NOAA will conduct a NEPA review
- NOAA will approve/deny permit with conditions
- The taskforce will annually review implementation of the program

This bill **does not** expand the number of sea lions that can be killed. It places a cap on the number of animals that can be removed, whereas there is currently no cap. Additionally, it bans the use of firearms.





A companion bill (HR 2083) recently passed the house by 289-115 with the unanimous support of the delegation from Idaho, Washington, and Oregon

SB 3119 has support from both Republican and Democratic Senators in the Pacific Northwest

The Governors of Idaho, Washington, and Oregon are in support of a legislative solution

SB 3119 is also supported by state and tribal managers, fishing groups, and conservation groups, including:

#### State and Federal

- Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife
- Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
- Idaho Department of Fish and Wildlife
- The Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
- The Oregon Sheriffs Association
- Pacific States Marine Fishery Commission
- Northwest Power and Conservation Council
- The Public Power Council
- Oregon Coastal Caucus

#### TRIBAL

- Columbia River Intertribal Fish Commission
- Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation
- Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation
- Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs
- Nez Perce Tribe

#### NGO –

- Wild Salmon Center, Northwest Sportfishing Industry Association, Trout Unlimited, Northwest River Partners, American Sportfishing Association, Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations (PCFFA), Coastal Conservation Association (CCA), Northwest Steelheaders, Northwest Marine Trade Association, Molalla River Alliance, Molalla River Watch, and over 150 businesses that depend on healthy fish runs.

### Will this harm sea lion populations?

Nothing in SB 3119 will harm the health of sea lion populations. The Marine Mammal Protection Act has been a tremendous success at recovering sea lions. There are now between 250,000 and 300,000 California sea lions and ~75 000 Steller sea lions.

- The MMPA does not allow killing of any sea lion stock that is ESA listed, or classified as depleted.
  - NOAA will be required to limit the number of sea lions that can be removed annually to less than 10% of the number that could be removed without impacting population health-this is extremely conservative.
  - In reality, there are 2-300 sea lions that would currently be eligible for removal
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### Won't other sea lions take their place?

We are talking about removing animals that exhibit a problem behavior. There is a very small proportion of the population that will ever do this. (e.g., we have up to 4000 California sea lions in the Columbia estuary and only ~2-300 swim upriver to these target areas). Research has shown that removing these animals before they habituate to these areas prevents additional animals recruiting and would result in having to kill fewer sea lions over time.

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### Shouldn't we try non-lethal methods first?

***We have demonstrated repeatedly that this is not effective.*** Oregon, Idaho, Washington, and the Columbia River Treaty Tribes have over three decades of experience implementing non-lethal deterrence in an attempt to reduce sea lion predation on salmonids.

- At Willamette Falls, sea lions were hazed for three years and during that time their numbers continued to increase and the predation rate rose.

A Congressionally funded scientific review of non-lethal deterrence measures concluded they are ineffective because sea lions learn to avoid or ignore the measure applied.

The federally appointed Pinniped-Fishery Interaction Task Force that oversees removals at Bonneville Dam has concluded that the current hazing program is not effective at reducing predation in the area.

In 2018, ODFW attempted to relocate animals from Willamette Falls to the OR coast-all 11 swam 220 miles back to the falls within 4-6 days-one animal was relocated twice and returned both times

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### Why was River Mile 112 chosen?

This ensures we target animals that feed almost exclusively on salmon/steelhead or sturgeon. Above RM 112 in the main-stem Columbia River, an individual sea lions diet consists of >99% salmon/steelhead/sturgeon/lamprey.

RM 112 is downstream of the major sturgeon spawning ground and Bonneville Dam but upstream of some of the major sea lion haul outs in the lower river. This allows sea lions to forage in 75% of the river below Bonneville without being subject to removal-we're just trying to protect the areas where fish are really vulnerable.

**Aren't sea lions just a scapegoat for the dams?**

- 1) Sea lions are problematic, or becoming problematic at a handful of locations in the lower Columbia. The majority of these are in the tributaries and are not associated with dams. Removal of the lower Snake Dams would have no impact on the health of these stocks, many of which are currently in good health and/or on an upward trajectory.
- 2) We are acutely aware of the many issues facing salmon, steelhead, and sturgeon in the basin. We continue to advocate for actions to the hydrosystem, hatcheries, harvest, and habitat to support the recovery of this region's iconic fish runs. However, if we avoid taking the hard step of managing sea lions in the basin, recovery will be all the more difficult for some stocks, while others will be placed on a rapid pathway to extinction. We have already seen this happen at Ballard Locks in Washington. Sea lions are not a scapegoat, but managing predation is now an essential part of recovering fish runs in the Columbia.