



November 28, 2018

Dear Legislators,

Our organizations, which represent tens of thousands of individuals and businesses across Washington state, are concerned about potential changes to the historic Columbia River Fishery Reform Policy (policy) being considered by the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission (Commission). The policy was adopted in 2013 as part of the bi-state harvest reforms agreed to by Oregon and Washington to improve the conservation of Columbia River salmon and phase out non-selective gillnets from the mainstem of the lower Columbia River. We need your help to ensure that the key conservation and economic tenets of the Columbia River Fishery Reform Policy are adhered to as promised to the public.

Despite the strong public support that exists for bi-state Columbia River reforms, there's an active effort underway to return this indiscriminate, destructive fishing gear to the lower mainstem Columbia River. It makes no sense to return controversial non-selective commercial fishing gears to the mainstem Columbia River when our state is working to conserve and recover Chinook salmon -- the preferred food source of the Southern Resident Killer Whales (which rely heavily on Columbia River Chinook) -- and WDFW is facing a significant budget shortfall.

Stakeholders from across the state have invested tens of thousands of hours into this policy, which was a compromise to allow more than enough time for the transition away from the use of non-selective gillnets in mainstem fisheries and move to live-release gears such as purse seines and traps. The reforms have shown promise in the six years since they were adopted, but key provisions like a gillnet license buyback have yet to be implemented by WDFW staff.

About 200,000 Washington residents have purchased an additional required annual endorsement fee to fish for Columbia River salmon and steelhead. Oregon adopted a similar endorsement fee to implement the bi-state reforms, which is purchased by approximately 175,000 additional anglers in Oregon. The Washington endorsement sunsets in 2019 and WDFW has agency request legislation to reauthorize the program. Uncertainty about the future of the Columbia River reform policy and recent management decisions related to Columbia River fisheries have created alarm among thousands of your constituents who fish this iconic river and care about the health of our salmon runs.

In addition to WDFW's request to reauthorize the Columbia River Salmon and Steelhead endorsement, the agency will also be requesting a general recreational license fee increase and tens of millions of dollars in additional General Fund revenue to address a massive budget shortfall, sustain essential agency operations, and aid Southern Resident Killer Whales. These critical efforts will be harmed by any policy decision to restore non-selective gillnet fishing to the lower Columbia River where 13 ESA-listed salmonid stocks migrate in route to their native rivers and streams.

Columbia River recreational fisheries provide immense benefits to our state's economy, way of life, and WDFW's budget. We encourage you to work with WDFW, the Fish and Wildlife Commission, and the Governor's office to ensure that the remaining aspects of the reforms are implemented, including a gillnet license buyback program that has been promised since 2013.

Thank you for your service.