



State of Washington  
DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

Mailing Address: 600 Capitol Way N, Olympia, WA 98501-1091 • (360) 902-2200 • TDD (360) 902-2207  
Main Office Location: Natural Resources Building, 1111 Washington Street SE, Olympia, WA

May 17, 2017

Washington State Congressional Delegation  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC

SENT VIA EMAIL

Dear Washington State Congressional Delegation Members:

On behalf of the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department), I am writing to urge your support for H.R. 2083. Over the last decade, predation by sea lions on salmon, steelhead, and sturgeon in the Columbia River has increased, putting our progress and investments in salmon recovery at risk.

Sea lion and seal populations in the Columbia River estuary have increased dramatically in the last few years. Recent surveys by the Washington and Oregon Departments of Fish and Wildlife have counted more than 2,300 sea lions and 6,000 harbor seals in the vicinity of Astoria, Oregon. They prey on salmon from in the lower stretch of the Columbia River all the way up to Bonneville Dam.

Predation is compromising the recovery of endangered salmon and steelhead populations in the Columbia River. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has estimated that sea lions have consumed nearly 10,000 adult spring Chinook salmon between the estuary and Bonneville Dam within the last year, with an estimated 25 to 35 percent of the overall fish consumed being Endangered Species Act listed stocks.

Congresswoman Jaime Herrera Beutler (R-WA) and Congressman Kurt Schrader (D-OR) recently introduced H.R. 2083 – the *Endangered Salmon and Fisheries Predation Prevention Act* – which would amend the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972 in an effort to reduce predation. Specifically, it grants tribal and government fish managers the authority to lethally remove a limited number of sea lions when they are not deterred by conventional hazing methods and in areas where they are posing most harm. The only sea lions that may be removed must be a part of a healthy population that is not listed as threatened or endangered. This legislation continues to build on previous iterations by requiring eligible entities to have received natural resource management training.

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This legislation – which is supported by a broad spectrum of Northwest residents, organizations and tribes – will enable state agencies and tribes to more effectively deal with mammalian predators. I urge your support for this legislation.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Please don't hesitate to be in touch if I can provide any information on this legislation or the Department's predator control efforts.

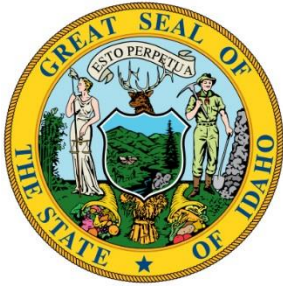
Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "J. Unsworth". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

James Unsworth, Ph.D.

Director

cc: The Honorable Jaime Herrera Beutler



IDAHO



OREGON



WASHINGTON

January 25, 2018

The Honorable Suzanne Bonamici  
439 Cannon Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Earl Blumenauer  
1111 Longworth Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Peter DeFazio  
2134 Rayburn Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Suzan DelBene  
Beutler  
2442 Rayburn Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Denny Heck  
425 Cannon Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jaime Herrera  
1107 Longworth Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Pramila Jayapal  
319 Cannon Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Derek Kilmer  
1520 Longworth Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Raúl R Labrador  
1523 Longworth Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rick Larsen  
2113 Rayburn Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Cathy McMorris Rodgers  
1314 Longworth Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Dan Newhouse  
1318 Longworth Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable David G. Riechert  
1127 Longworth Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kurt Schrader  
2431 Rayburn Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mike Simpson  
2084 Rayburn Office Building

The Honorable Adam Smith  
2264 Rayburn Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Greg Walden  
2184 Rayburn Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Northwest House Delegation Members:

As Governors that are working to recover Columbia basin salmon and steelhead, we urge you to support legislation aimed at reducing sea lion predation on threatened and endangered and other at-risk fish populations. Although several hundred million dollars are invested annually to rebuild these native fish runs, their health and sustainability is threatened unless Congress acts to enhance protection from increasing sea lion predation.

Over the last decade, predation by sea lions on salmon, steelhead, sturgeon, and lamprey in the Columbia River has increased dramatically. State researchers have estimated that sea lions consume about 20 percent of the entire spring Chinook run. More recent year research by NOAA Fisheries has found that up to 45 percent of spring Chinook adult salmon disappear between the estuary and Bonneville Dam. Much of that loss can be attributed to sea lions.

The risk is not unique to spring Chinook. Oregon scientists have concluded that wild winter steelhead are at extreme risk of extinction if the current rate of sea lion predation continues in the Willamette River. Additionally, Columbia River sturgeon are being impacted by sea lion predation at alarming rates.

It's hard to imagine successful recovery of threatened and endangered fish populations with these high levels of interception by sea lions.

H.R. 2083, the Endangered Salmon and Fisheries Protection Act, augments existing state, federal, and tribal authorities and allows quicker and more efficient intervention but still limits lethal removal. Hopefully, both parties can agree on a version of this bill that will gain broad bipartisan support in the Senate as well as the House.

No one wants to harm these great marine mammals, but effectively dealing with a small fraction of the healthy sea lion population is preferable to losing unique and irreplaceable species of salmon.

Sincerely,



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C. L. "Butch" Otter  
Governor  
State of Idaho



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Kate Brown  
Governor  
State of Oregon



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Jay Inslee  
Governor  
State of Washington



Washington State  
Department of Fish and  
Wildlife  
600 Capitol Way North  
Olympia, WA 98501  
Phone: (360) 902-2200



Oregon Department of  
Fish and Wildlife  
4034 Fairview Industrial  
Drive SE  
Salem, OR 97302  
Phone: (503) 947-6000



Idaho State  
Department of Fish and  
Game  
Post Office Box 25  
Boise, ID 83707  
Phone: (208) 334-3700



Columbia River Inter-  
Tribal Fish Commission  
700 NE Multnomah St.,  
Suite. 1200  
Portland, OR 97232  
Phone: (503) 238-0667

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March 16, 2018

VIA EMAIL and Regular Mail: [chris.w.oliver@noaa.gov](mailto:chris.w.oliver@noaa.gov) [Barry.Thom@noaa.gov](mailto:Barry.Thom@noaa.gov)

Chris Oliver  
Assistant Administrator  
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration - Fisheries  
1401 Constitution Avenue NW, Room 5128  
Washington, DC 20230

Barry Thom  
Regional Administrator, West Coast Region  
National Marine Fisheries Service  
1201 Northeast Lloyd Boulevard, Suite 1100  
Portland, OR 97232

Dear Mr. Oliver and Mr. Thom:

On behalf of the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW), Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG), and the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission (CRITFC), we are writing to express appreciation for the support of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration-Fisheries (NOAA Fisheries) for the efforts of ODFW, WDFW, IDFG, and CRITFC to implement Section 120 of the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) in the Columbia River Basin. As pinniped predation continues to constitute a significant threat to ESA listed fish runs below Bonneville Dam and expands to other areas of the Columbia River Basin, we strongly urge NOAA Fisheries to provide authorization and financial support to manage pinniped predation in cooperation with state and federal agencies and tribes as detailed below.

**1. Provide resources needed to expediently process Upper Willamette River (UWR) Winter Steelhead Section 120 Permit application**

Recently, ODFW has submitted a Section 120 application to NOAA Fisheries to address California sea lion (CSL) predation on winter steelhead. This request is in response to significant declines in UWR steelhead over the past decade. This year marked a record low return with an escapement of just 512 fish for the Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed populations. The declines have coincided with increased



occupation by CSL, with single day occupancy at Willamette Falls increasing from 5-6 individuals in the 1990's to 40 in 2017.

Predation rates on UWR steelhead between 2014 and 2017 ranged from 11 to 25% of the total run at Willamette Falls. ODFW's recently completed population viability analysis demonstrated that sea lions are having a large negative effect on the viability of winter steelhead in the three major populations. The quasi-extinction risk increases from <5% to 20-64% depending on the steelhead population. CSL predation clearly represents a heightened extinction risk to an already threatened population of steelhead, and must be immediately addressed.

NOAA Fisheries review of Section 120 applications is rigorous, and the analysis includes review of relevant statutes and regulations from the MMPA, ESA, and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The amount of time and resources invested in these processes will only increase with the submission of more applications seeking to address the CSL issues emerging in other areas of the Columbia Basin and west coast. Providing sufficient funds and resources to accomplish a timely review of the application for Willamette falls, and future applications will result in the better management of these problems as they emerge.

We request that NMFS prioritize resources needed to review and process the recently submitted Section 120 application for intentional lethal take of CSL so that it is in place for the 2018 steelhead return.

**2. Adopt the Task-Force recommendations regarding the conditions of the existing Section 120 Permit for lethal take at Bonneville Dam to improve effectiveness and efficiency of the program.**

Currently ODFW, WDFW, and IDFG hold a permit for intentional lethal take of CSL that are having a significant negative impact on ESA-listed salmon and steelhead at Bonneville Dam. The Bonneville Pinniped-Fishery Interaction Taskforce (PFITF) convened by NMFS has reviewed the efficacy of the program and made the following recommendations for improvements:

- 1) Modify the criteria required for lethal take as follows: *An animal may be removed if it is individually identifiable and has been seen eating salmon, ~~and~~ OR has been observed in the observation area for X days.*
- 2) Reduce the number of days of observation required from 5 days to 3 days.

We request that NMFS adopt these recommendations for implementation in 2018.

**3. Dedicate increased funding for pass-through grants needed by States and Tribes for Section 120 permit implementation.**

The United States Army Corps of Engineers, ODFW, WDFW, and CRITFC have historically served as the lead entities documenting CSL predation in the Columbia Basin, thus providing the data needed for Section 120 applications. As CSLs habituate in other areas off the Columbia River's mainstem, these entities will need additional resources for the monitoring and research of pinniped behavior and predation trends to satisfy the rigorous requirements prescribed in Section 120.

Mr. Chris Oliver  
Mr. Barry Thom  
March 16, 2018  
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The United States Department of Agriculture and CRITFC currently perform hazing operations below Bonneville Dam, with ODFW and WDFW conducting the trapping, identification, and lethal removal of CSLs. Continuation of hazing, trapping, identification, and lethal operations will require continued funding at Bonneville and additional funding to initiate or maintain similar programs as pinniped predation issues continue to develop in other areas away from the mainstem of the Columbia River.

We appreciate your consideration of these urgent matters and look forward to working with NOAA Fisheries to more effectively address the conservation needs of pinnipeds, salmon, and steelhead populations.

Sincerely,



Joe Stohr  
Acting Director  
Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife



Curtis E. Melcher  
Director  
Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife



Virgil Moore  
Director  
Idaho Fish and Game



Jaime A. Pinkham  
Executive Director  
Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission



June 29, 2018

The Honorable Mike Crapo  
239 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable James Risch  
483 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Jeff Merkley  
313 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Ron Wyden  
221 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray  
154 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Maria Cantwell  
511 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Northwest Senate Delegation Members:

As Governors that are working to recover Columbia basin salmon and steelhead, we urge you to support legislation aimed at reducing sea lion predation on threatened and endangered and other at-risk fish populations. Although several hundred million dollars are invested annually to rebuild these native fish runs, their health and sustainability is threatened unless Congress acts to enhance protection from increasing sea lion predation.

Over the last decade, predation by sea lions on salmon, steelhead, sturgeon, and lamprey in the Columbia River has increased dramatically. State researchers have estimated that sea lions consume about 20 percent of the entire spring Chinook run. More recent year research by NOAA Fisheries has found that up to 43 percent of spring Chinook adult salmon disappear between the estuary and Bonneville Dam. Much of that loss can be attributed to sea lions.

The risk is not unique to spring Chinook. Oregon scientists have concluded that wild winter steelhead are at extreme risk of extinction if the current rate of sea lion predation continues in the Willamette River. Additionally, Columbia River sturgeon are being impacted by sea lion predation at alarming rates.

It's hard to imagine successful recovery of threatened and endangered fish populations with these high levels of interception by sea lions.

The Senate companion to the recently passed House bill, S. 3119, sponsored by Sen. Maria Cantwell and Sen. James Risch, would augment existing authorities and allow for quicker and more efficient intervention while still limiting lethal removal, changes that are vital to the long-



term survival of salmonid species in our states. We believe the final version should allow wildlife managers to address sea lion populations within their appropriate jurisdictions.

No one wants to harm these great marine mammals, but effectively dealing with a small fraction of the healthy sea lion population is preferable to losing unique and irreplaceable species of salmon.

Sincerely,



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C. L. "Butch" Otter  
Governor  
State of Idaho



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Kate Brown  
Governor  
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Jay Inslee  
Governor  
State of Washington