



Representative Herrera Buetler
1107 Longworth HOB
Washington, D.C. 20515

Honorable Representative Herrera Buetler,

As representatives of Pacific Northwest businesses that depend on healthy fish runs for our livelihoods we are writing to express our support for the passage of HR 2083, the Endangered Salmon and Fisheries Predation Prevention Act, in the amended form that will be voted on this week. We are pleased that the legislation has growing bipartisan support and has been endorsed by the largest newspaper in the region as well as by smaller local periodicals.

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 relatively small percent of the overall sea lion population. We know this is learned because 20 years ago, we did not have this problem.

At various pinch points in river systems, (Bonneville Dam, Willamette Falls, narrow riffles in the Clackamas, Sandy and Cowlitz Basins, for instance) where salmon and steelhead must pass to get to their natal streams, they are completely vulnerable to predatory pinnipeds. National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) marine mammal biologists project that sea lions are taking a minimum of 20% of the spring chinook run in the Columbia. They also believe that sea lions are the primary entity responsible for the fact that 43% of the spring chinook that enter the Columbia River do not make it to Bonneville Dam.

Above Willamette Falls, an Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife risk assessment has placed the possibility of extinction at over 90% for some stocks of wild winter Steelhead, if predation at the falls is not quickly addressed. These and other scientific studies provide ample evidence of what is happening to salmon, steelhead and sturgeon stocks as pinnipeds reach full carrying capacity. While the taxpayers and rate payers are spending hundreds of millions of dollars every year to protect and recover the northwest's signature stocks, we cannot afford to ignore this science.

None of us can ever forget what happened at Ballard Locks in Seattle, starting in the mid- 1980s. Sea lions ate so many winter run steelhead heading through the locks to Lake Washington that the run of fish is no longer viable. At the time, the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife was practicing all manner of non-lethal management actions of the sea lions--to no effect.

Every other activity that has a measurable impact on salmon populations is currently regulated with the aim of reducing or eliminating impacts on listed stocks: 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 Sea lions should not be exempt from management. The spectacular success of the Marine Mammal Protection Act should not be a path to extinction for salmon and steelhead. Only Congress can amend this process to ensure salmon, steelhead and sturgeon populations have a chance to recover and are not further weakened by unmanaged healthy pinnipeds.

We must protect our iconic salmon and steelhead and we would be deeply grateful for your acknowledgement that the issue of pinniped predation in the Columbia river must be addressed legislatively. We cannot thank you enough for your support on this issue.

Sincerely,

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