



## Washington State Senate

Mr. Daniel Ashe, Director  
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20240

January 26, 2016

Ms. Eileen Sobeck, Assistant Administrator for Fisheries  
NOAA Fisheries  
1315 East-West Highway  
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Director Ashe and Assistant Administrator Sobeck,

Thousands of our constituents are concerned about the serious legal threat facing over 150 salmon and steelhead hatchery programs in Washington State. These hatcheries, and the fisheries they support, are at risk of closure due to the lack of federal approvals and permits for the Hatchery Genetic Management Plans (HGMPs) required by law. With five Puget Sound steelhead hatchery programs facing imminent closure and other hatchery programs also at risk of additional third party lawsuits, we urge you to provide the necessary resources and staffing to make the prompt review and approval of these HGMPs a priority for NOAA Fisheries and USFWS.

Action is needed now by NOAA Fisheries and the USFWS to secure the necessary HGMP approvals and federal permits by April 1 for the five steelhead hatchery programs so the juvenile steelhead can be released into rivers when they are physically ready. Otherwise WDFW would likely have no choice but to end the programs – an outcome that would not be based on good science and conservation, but only because your agencies could not provide your approvals in time and anticipated litigation ran out the clock before judicial review could be accomplished. The juvenile hatchery fish would be wasted for a third and final year. The resulting loss of sport and tribal fisheries would have significant adverse economic and social impacts, especially on the rural communities that support these fisheries.

Over the past decade, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) has submitted 112 HGMPs to NOAA Fisheries and the USFWS for their review and approval under the ESA. Dozens of additional tribal HGMPs are also pending review and approval, including several high priority proposals collaboratively developed with the Congressionally-mandated Hatchery

Scientific Review Group (HSRG) and the recreational fishing community. While we recognize that reviewing the sheer number of HGMPs represents a significant workload for your agencies, we are concerned that less than 15 percent have been reviewed and approved thus far. Without swift review and approval, all of these hatchery programs are at a severe risk of litigation based solely on the lack of the required federal permits.


We understand that the Washington Congressional delegation was successful in securing \$4 million in additional Fiscal Year 2016 funding for NOAA Fisheries to complete these types of ESA reviews. In light of the short window of time available, this money will be critical to expedite NOAA Fisheries' review process and we hope it will be promptly allocated to our region to fund the efforts of NOAA Fisheries, the Tribes, the State of Washington and the HSRG as was intended.

Our state has also committed significant resources to the challenges facing our hatcheries. In fact, over the past five years the legislature has provided nearly \$100 million in capital budget funding to upgrade and modernize hatchery operations. Many of these needed improvements were identified in independent scientific reviews by the HSRG. WDFW has also requested additional funding – much of it license revenue generated by over 800,000 anglers who fish in Washington annually – to assist in the review process.

As you know, salmon and steelhead play a critical role in the social, cultural, and economic fabric of the Pacific Northwest. The state of Washington, our tribal co-managers, and public stakeholders across the state have made significant contributions to the unprecedented national effort to recover wild salmon populations - including those listed under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA). Our state has also been a leader in implementing hatchery reform and following scientifically sound management principles in an effort to conserve wild populations and sustain recreational, commercial, and tribal treaty salmon fisheries. These fisheries are worth over \$1 billion annually to our economy and are heavily dependent on fish produced in hatcheries to mitigate for past changes to salmon habitat.

We appreciate your prompt attention to this urgent issue and stand ready to work with you.

Sincerely,



Senator Sharon Nelson

34<sup>th</sup> District



Senator Linda Parlette

12<sup>th</sup> District

Senator Karen Fraser 22<sup>nd</sup> District

Senator Bob Hasagawa 11<sup>th</sup> District

Senator John Braun 20<sup>th</sup> District

Senator Steve Conway 29<sup>th</sup> District

Senator Jan Angel 26<sup>th</sup> District

Senator Christine Rolfes 23<sup>rd</sup> District

Senator Kirk Pearson 39<sup>th</sup> District

Senator Mark Mullet 5<sup>th</sup> District

Senator Bruce Dammeier 25<sup>th</sup> District

Senator John McCoy 38<sup>th</sup> District

Senator Judy Warnick 13<sup>th</sup> District

Senator Randi Becker 2<sup>nd</sup> District

Senator Dean Takko 19<sup>th</sup> District

Senator Pam Roach 31<sup>st</sup> District

Senator Pramila Jayapal 37<sup>th</sup> District

Senator Mike Padden 4<sup>th</sup> District



Senator Maralyn Chase      32<sup>nd</sup> District



Senator Kevin Ranker      40<sup>th</sup> District

Cc:    Mr. William Stelle, Administrator, NOAA Fisheries West Coast Region  
      Mrs. Robyn Thorson, Director, USFWS Pacific Region  
      Washington State Congressional Delegation  
      Governor Jay Inslee  
      Dr. Jim Unsworth, WDFW Director  
      Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission