



Washington State Legislature

December 7th, 2016

Dr. Bradley Smith, Chairman
Washington Fish & Wildlife Commission
600 Capitol Way N
Olympia, WA 98501

James Unsworth, Director
WA Dept. of Fish & Wildlife
600 Capitol Way N
Olympia, WA 98501

Chairman Smith and Director Unsworth,

We understand the Fish and Wildlife Commission (Commission) is initiating a review of the Columbia River Basin Salmon management policy and considering possible changes to the plan through adaptive management. We are writing in support of the continued implementation of the bi-state Columbia River fishery reforms, which seek to improve the conservation of Columbia River fisheries and prioritize the economic and license revenue contributions of the basin's recreational fisheries – an important topic as the next legislature prepares to consider WDFW's proposed recreational license fee increase and the reauthorization of the Columbia River Basin Salmon and Steelhead Endorsement.

As you know, in 2012 Washington and Oregon initiated the development of a bistate, compromise plan to improve the management of Columbia River fisheries and resolve decades of ongoing conflict and controversy surrounding the use of non-tribal gillnets in the lower Columbia River. 21 members of the Washington Legislature – most of them representing districts along the Columbia River – sent the Commission a letter in support of the reforms on October 31, 2012 (attached). The Commission ultimately adopted the reform policy on January 12, 2013 following a similar action by the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission.

Despite widespread support for the bi-state plan, there is growing concern that Oregon is proposing to abandon key aspects of the reforms ahead of their full implementation in 2017. These changes could reverse promised enhancements of recreational fishing opportunity and allow the continued use of non-selective commercial gillnets in the mainstem Columbia – two changes that will be highly controversial and negatively impact recreational fisheries from the river's mouth to the upper Columbia in Eastern Washington.

We acknowledge that the Commission's Columbia River policy requires the use of adaptive management to achieve the key objectives of the plan, including prioritizing mainstem recreational fisheries, transitioning non-selective gillnet fisheries to off-channel areas, and maintaining the viability of the commercial industry through enhanced selective fisheries. While some limited adaptations to the policy may be necessary, Oregon is proposing to undo the plan based on a desire to significantly increase commercial gillnet industry profits, rather than ensuring the viability of the commercial fishing industry as defined in the bi-state agreement (\$3.6 million ex-vessel value - tables C4/C5 of the workgroup report). We urge you to reject this proposal and faithfully implement the primary objectives of the plan.

Over 200,000 recreational anglers from across Washington State purchase the required \$8.75 Columbia River Salmon and Steelhead Endorsement to fish the Columbia River basin each

year. Combined with revenue from sportfishing licenses fees and federal excise taxes on fishing tackle, Columbia River recreational fisheries generate tens of millions in revenue in support of WDFW's biennial budget. By comparison, the state receives just a fraction of this amount in license fee and excise tax revenue from Columbia River commercial salmon fisheries. We also know that the economic value of sport-caught Columbia River salmon also far exceeds the economic value of a fish caught and sold commercially.

WDFW continues to face serious challenges funding agency programs due to declining federal funding and insufficient general fund support. In recent years, the agency has sought recreational license fee increases and new endorsement fees to help fill the void. The agency's current license fee proposal, if adopted, would increase fees for a Columbia River salmon and steelhead angler by about 70 percent. Building public support for this magnitude of a fee increase is already proving challenging and will be made even more difficult if the Columbia River reforms are not implemented as promised.

We look forward to working with you to improve the management of our fisheries and the many benefits they provide to local communities, the State of Washington, and WDFW.

Sincerely,



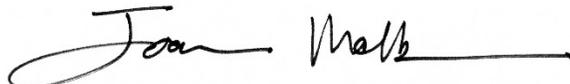
Representative Derek Stanford, PhD
1st Legislative District



Representative Ed Orcutt
20th Legislative District



Representative Liz Pike
18th Legislative District



Representative Joan McBride
48th Legislative District



Representative Patty Kuderer
48th Legislative District



Representative Paul Harris
17th Legislative District



Representative Brandon Vick
18th Legislative District



Representative Mia Gregerson
31st Legislative District



Representative Mike Sells
38th Legislative District



Representative Joe Schmick
9th Legislative District



Representative Jay Rodne
5th Legislative District



Representative Eric Pettigrew
37th Legislative District



Representative Roger Goodman
45th Legislative District



Representative Cary Condotta
12th Legislative District



Representative Dan Griffey
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Representative Jessyn Farrell
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Representative Dave Hayes
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Representative Jake Fey
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Representative Bruce Chandler
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