

State of
Washington
House of
Representatives



August 24, 2020

Larry Carpenter, Chairman
Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission
600 Capitol Way N
Olympia, WA 98501
Larry.Carpenter@dfw.wa.gov

Kelly Susewind, Director
Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission
600 Capitol Way N
Olympia, WA 98501
Kelly.Susewind@dfw.wa.gov

RE: Columbia River Basin Salmon Management Policy (C-3620)

Chairman Carpenter and Director Susewind:

We have serious concerns with proposed changes to the Commission's Columbia River Basin Salmon Management Policy (C-3620) that would undo efforts to enhance the conservation and selectivity of Columbia River salmon fisheries under the Oregon-Washington Columbia River reforms. The Commission's recent actions to undermine the bi-state reforms by returning non-tribal gillnets to the mainstem lower Columbia River have been immensely unpopular with our constituents and comes as several salmon and steelhead populations are in steep decline. The actions have also cost the Department critical support from recreational anglers – a stakeholder group that is key to the long-term financial solvency of the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW).

Columbia River basin fisheries require careful, proactive management with 13 species of salmon and steelhead listed under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) along with federal requirements dictating the harvest or removal of excess hatchery fish as a condition of continued hatchery operations. These challenges have driven the transition to fishing methods more capable of selectively harvesting hatchery-reared salmon while also providing increased escapement of ESA-listed and weak wild stocks. By design, gillnets are ill-suited for meeting these challenges in the mainstem lower Columbia River's mixed-stock fisheries where wild and ESA-listed salmon and steelhead are intermingled with fin-clipped hatchery-reared salmon.

The Oregon-Washington reforms were designed with this in mind and to resolve decades of conflict and controversy by shifting gillnets out of the mainstem, increasing gillnet harvests in off-channel fishing areas through enhanced hatchery production, and prioritizing mark-selective fishing methods in the mainstem – including recreational fisheries across the Columbia River basin. The plan represents a durable solution that maintains a commercial fishery, focuses on the recovery needs of wild and ESA-listed salmon and steelhead, and provides more predictability and certainty for recreational fisheries across the Columbia River basin – an important objective given the need for selective fisheries and WDFW's reliance on license fees to help relieve budget shortfalls. While the fundamental components of the reforms remain sound, WDFW has not implemented key aspects of the reforms, including pursuing a gillnet license buyback and correcting agency errors toward implementing alternative, selective commercial fishing gears.

Instead of committing to addressing these failures, the draft policy being considered by the Commission abandons the reforms and opens the door to year-round gillnetting in the mainstem Columbia River. The draft policy is also inconsistent with the legal requirements in place in the State of Oregon, setting the stage for a possible break in concurrent management for the first time since the Columbia River Compact was adopted in 1915.

There are few Northwest fisheries issues more controversial with the public than the use of non-tribal gillnets in the lower Columbia River. The controversial actions taken by the Commission last year resulted in the loss of the Columbia River Salmon and Steelhead Endorsement, which provided WDFW much needed revenue for the management of Columbia River fisheries. The controversy has also been one of the primary reasons that agency requested legislation to increase recreational fishing license fees has failed to gain support in recent years. Adopting a policy that formally abandons the bi-state Columbia River reforms will elicit strong opposition to any fee increase legislation, which could have serious implications for WDFW's 2021-2023 operating budget as the state grapples with reduced revenues due to COVID-19.

We urge you not to abandon the guiding principles of the Oregon-Washington Columbia River fishery reforms. Instead, the Commission should maintain restrictions on mainstem gillnetting and outline a plan that includes clear expectations and benchmarks for the full transition away from gillnets in mainstem fisheries.

Sincerely,



Monica Jurado Stonier
State Representative-49th Legislative District



Andrew Barkis
State Representative-2nd Legislative District



Tom Dent
State Representative-13th Legislative District



Mary Dye
State Representative-9th Legislative District



Bill Jenkin
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Carolyn Eslick
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Larry Carpenter, Chairman
Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission
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Kelly Susewind, Director
Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
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June 29th, 2020

RE: Columbia River Basin Salmon Management Policy (C-3620)

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Sincerely,



Senator Kevin Van De Wege
24th Legislative District



Senator Karen Keiser
33rd Legislative District



Senator Derrick Stanford
1st Legislative District



Senator Annette Cleveland
49th Legislative District



Senator Claire Wilson
30th Legislative District



Senator Jesse Salomon
32nd Legislative district



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Senator Steve O'Ban
28th Legislative District

Senator Ann Rivers
18th Legislative District

Senator Lynda Wilson
17th Legislative District

Senator Marko Lias
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