



October 20, 2020

The Honorable Kate Brown
 Governor
 State of Oregon
 900 Court Street NE, Suite 254
 Salem, OR 97301-4047

The Honorable Jay Inslee
 Governor
 State of Washington
 PO Box 40002
 Olympia, WA 98504-0002

Dear Governor Brown and Governor Inslee,

We are alarmed by the recent vote of the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission (WFWC) to undo key Columbia River salmon and steelhead fishery reforms by returning non-selective commercial gillnets to the mainstem lower Columbia River. The recently adopted WFWC policy (C-3620) is inconsistent with the conservation needs of wild Columbia River basin salmon and steelhead, undermines critical efforts to implement alternative, selective commercial fishing gears, and will erode public confidence and support for state fish and wildlife agencies. We respectfully ask that you direct your fish and wildlife commissions to abandon this misguided effort.

The policy, adopted by an acrimonious 5-4 vote of the WFWC, was opposed by conservation organizations, county governments, salmon recovery boards, and over 120 sportfishing organizations and businesses. The WFWC also received letters from nearly 40 Washington state legislators expressing concern with the policy and potential implications on funding for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). Despite this overwhelming opposition, the WFWC narrowly adopted C-3620 and is now urging the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission (OFWC) to “compromise” under the guise of concurrency. Oregon should stand firm in support of its Columbia River fishery reform rules – a key component of its “All H” approach to Columbia River basin salmon and steelhead recovery.

C-3620 would restore non-selective gillnetting throughout the mainstem lower Columbia River during the spring, summer, and fall seasons – in some cases even before uncertain forecasts of Endangered Species Act (ESA) listed salmon can be confirmed through dam passage counts. The Commission also voted to restore non-selective mainstem summer gillnet fisheries despite

information showing this will harm the conservation of summer Chinook and flies in the face of the selective fishing practices of the recreational fishery and some upriver tribes.

Increasing mainstem gillnetting also threatens non-target species caught as bycatch, including imperiled ESA-listed “B-run” steelhead. The WFWC ignored extensive public comment about the lack of science to support agency estimates of the level of steelhead mortality in current mainstem gillnet fisheries, let alone under the expanded mainstem gillnet fisheries being proposed. The fact is that after decades of use in the mainstem lower Columbia River, the states have never conducted the studies needed to quantify steelhead release mortality rates in gillnets – despite requiring that these studies be conducted for alternative, selective fishing gears like pound nets and purse seines. The states’ current estimates are based on assumptions, with no grounding in gillnet release mortality data or sound science.

There has also been no requirement for regular on-board monitoring of gillnet fisheries, a critical tool for estimating gillnet mortality and ensuring that our endangered and depressed stocks of fish are being adequately protected. In fact, since 1986 there have been approximately 70 mainstem gillnet seasons (summer, fall, etc.) but according to WDFW data on-board monitoring has occurred only six times – less than 10-percent of the time. The WFWC vote to drastically increase mainstem gillnetting ignores these serious shortcomings and puts the conservation of wild steelhead in further jeopardy.

Our organizations do have differing opinions on issues like hatchery production, marine mammal predation, and fishing closure areas, but we are united in our opposition to the WFWC’s C-3620. If implemented, this misguided policy would also drastically erode the public and political support for the Washington and Oregon fish and wildlife departments – potentially impacting agency budgets set by rightly upset state legislators. WDFW already faces growing concern and skepticism in the Washington legislature. We do not want the same to happen in Oregon.

We urge you to direct your fish and wildlife commissions to maintain the progress that has been made to improve the selectivity of Columbia River commercial and recreational fisheries by moving forward with the reforms to transition non-selective gillnets out of the mainstem lower Columbia River, which is just one part of the region’s overall commitment to restore wild Columbia River basin salmon and steelhead populations.

Sincerely,

Nello Picinich, Executive Director
CCA Washington

Liz Hamilton, Executive Director
Northwest Sportfishing Industry Association

Guido Rahr, President & CEO
Wild Salmon Center

David A. Moskowitz, Executive Director
The Conservation Angler

Chris Cone, Executive Director
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Chris Hager, Executive Director
Association of Northwest Steelheaders

Mark Rogers, Chair
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Gregory Topf, Board Chair
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Bob Rees, Executive Director
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Cc: Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission
Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission
Curt Melcher, Director, ODFW
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