April 27, 2016

Bob Turner, Assistant Regional Manager
NOAA Fisheries West Coast Region
510 Desmond Dr. SE Suite 103
Lacey, WA 98503

Mr. Turner,

After months of negotiations, officials from the Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife (WDFW) and Puget Sound treaty tribes failed to reach agreement on salmon fishing seasons in the Puget Sound. Due to the dysfunctional “North of Falcon” season-setting process, it now appears that fishery managers will need to obtain their own federal permits separately from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). Uncertainty about receiving a timely federal permit for Puget Sound sport fisheries is causing significant concern in areas of King County, specifically in the 5th Legislative District which I currently serve as State Representative. Many local residents are deeply concerned that Puget Sound sport fisheries could be shut down this season due to the delays at NOAA to issue federal permits.

This is just the latest crisis affecting our salmon fisheries. As you know, over 150 hatchery programs across our state are at risk of litigation and closure due to a lack of federal review and permits from NOAA. There are hatcheries in my district that have been waiting on their federal permit approval for as long as 10 years. As their state legislator, I find that unacceptable. Washington State has a long and successful history in responsible hatchery production and conserving wild salmon protected by the Endangered Species Act (ESA). All of this is at risk due to inaction.

Jim Unsworth, the director of the WDFW, has been particularly considerate with the tribes in negotiating conservation goals. The WDFW attempted to craft a responsible plan alongside the tribes to address the predicted downturn in Coho this year and meet conservation requirements for Chinook. However, I understand that a small minority of tribes were inflexible in their negotiations, objected to the state’s conservation management techniques (including catch-and-release and mark-selective fishing), and demanded that unassociated fisheries close altogether until the Coho experience an uptick in their wild populations. These types of demands don’t belong in the co-management process.

For many of my constituents, fishing is a form of outdoor recreation that defines what it means to be a Washingtonian. For the first time in history, our state will now see what it is like to have a summer without fishing anywhere on the Puget Sound -- unless NOAA acts swiftly.
Another unsavory outcome of this decision will be the negative economic impacts of lost revenue to many fishing businesses. Commercial and recreational fisheries contribute roughly $1 billion annually to my state’s economy, and the WDFW operates largely by revenue generated from fishing licenses. It is a great frustration and disappointment to see passionate outdoor enthusiasts, who have made fishing their livelihood over the generations, be threatened with a substantial loss of opportunity and economic dip due to a lack of leadership on the part of this agency.

Because of this unique and unprecedented circumstance, I ask that you please provide the necessary leadership, resources, and staff to respond to this crisis with rapidity and concern.

I greatly appreciate you taking the time to read my thoughts on this matter and hope that you will give your attention to this important work promptly.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Representative Chad Magendanz
5th Legislative District

CC: William Stelle, NOAA Fisheries West Coast Region
Barry Thom, NOAA Fisheries West Coast Region