



Northwest RiverPartners Praises Congressional Efforts to Reduce Sea Lion Feasting

Tribes, dam operators, legislators, and fish and wildlife agencies are finding themselves on the same side of salmon preservation efforts recently, agreeing that legislation is needed to rid the waters of problem sea lions chomping at will upon endangered Columbia River salmon.

The “Endangered Salmon Predation Prevention Act,” introduced in October by Washington Congressmen Brian Baird and Doc Hastings, creates a temporary, expedited process for Washington, Oregon and the four Columbia River treaty tribes to obtain permits for the lethal removal of a limited number of California sea lions preying on salmon and steelhead in the Columbia River. The temporary process will allow the states time to develop a more permanent program — a process that can take several years.

“We are delighted that our congressional delegation is taking on this serious threat to salmon and steelhead,” said Terry Flores, Northwest RiverPartners executive director. “Salmon consumed by sea lions are adults that have made it down through the dams, survived in the ocean for three or more years, and avoided being commercially harvested. These are the 'lotto winners' of salmon survival carrying the next generation of the species that we’re losing to ravenous sea lions.”



Flores added that it is refreshing to see attention paid to broader issues affecting salmon recovery. “Regional businesses and families are making huge investments to upgrade hydro operations to make incremental gains in salmon recovery,” she said. “We cannot focus solely upon hydro. Other solutions must also be offered to affect salmon recovery and address habitat, hatcheries and harvest. The removal of problem sea lions is an excellent step forward.”

Estimates place salmon mortality from California sea lions as high as three percent of the spring Chinook returns. "When we're spending hundreds of millions of dollars per year in direct spending on salmon recovery, our region cannot afford to ignore the effect of these sea lions," said Congressman Doc Hastings, a co-sponsor of the legislation.

In recent years, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has observed that thousands of returning salmon are killed by sea lions in the area around Bonneville Dam alone. The proposed, streamlined process would be used in cases where non-lethal methods to discourage sea lion predation have been shown to be ineffective.

"This bill is another tool to use in limited situations after all other options have been exhausted. It will send a strong message that the 'all-you-can-eat' salmon buffet at Bonneville Dam is closed," said Congressman Brian Baird.

"We are grateful that Congressmen Hastings, Baird, Dicks and Walden have introduced this important bill and we hope Congress will act on it expeditiously and certainly before next year's spring runs," said Lavina Washines, chairwoman of the Tribal Council of the Yakama Nation. "We hope our friends in the environmental and animal rights communities will understand that salmon have become endangered while sea lions have proliferated in numbers."

An editorial in the *Tri-City Herald* put the issue in perfect context: "If people can seriously consider dam removal and the havoc that would bring to the Northwest economy as a means to protect salmon in the Columbia River, killing a few sea lions seems like a much more rational solution."

The legislation will need to be reintroduced in Congress next year, and Northwest RiverPartners encourages its members to voice support for this measure.

Check out the **Quick Links at the end of this newsletter for more information about the Endangered Salmon Predation Prevention Act.*

First Annual Meeting Features Remarks From BPA's Steve Wright

It was a dark and stormy night, but members and friends of Northwest RiverPartners disregarded the challenging weather and attended the organization's first Annual Meeting on November 2.

Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) Administrator Steve Wright provided the keynote remarks, observing that the two largest cost drivers on BPA's system are

generation to serve increased load and fish mitigation costs. “As we move to tier our rates, generation costs are less of an issue, but fish costs are the greatest uncertainty.”

Wright said, “BPA has a clear, statutory mandate to mitigate for damage to fish and wildlife caused by federal hydro, and we intend to be successful at that mission.”

He added that the Oregon District Court is saying that the current balance is wrong, but isn’t saying what the right balance is. The court is demanding a state/tribal/federal collaboration and is inviting a consensus decision consistent with the law.

“The issue is big, and one that BPA cannot handle by itself on behalf of ratepayers.” Wright said. “I think it’s clear that we’re not going to get out of the courtroom with costs lower than today. The question is how much and will it be effective? That’s where groups like Northwest RiverPartners are important: The group is pushing for effectiveness and efficiency, and is working to create solutions that restore salmon at an affordable price.”

Chair Jean Ryckman, Franklin PUD, presided over the short business meeting that included approval of bylaws and election of Steering Committee members. Northwest RiverPartners Executive Director Terry Flores talked about the accomplishments of the organization, and its valuable partnerships.

Steering Committee Members re-elected at the meeting are: Jean Ryckman, Franklin PUD; Kay Gabriel, Weyerhaeuser; Ken Canon, ICNU; Tim Culbertson, Grant PUD; John Saven, NRU; Larry LaBolle, Avista; and, Jack Speer, Alcoa. Newly elected to the Steering Committee are: Steve Klein, Snohomish PUD and Scott Corwin, PNGC. Klein and Corwin will replace outgoing members: Steve Eldrige, Umatilla PUD and Jim Sanders, Benton County PUD.

Quick Links

- Read a summary of the Endangered Salmon Predation Prevention Act.
<http://www.nwriverpartners.org/documents/EndangeredSalmonPredationPreventionActSummary-10-16-06.pdf>
- Read an article about the Endangered Salmon Predation Prevention Act.
<http://www.nwriverpartners.org/documents/CongressionalRemedytoSeaLionvsSalmon-10-16-06.pdf>
- See what Congressman Hastings says about the Act.
<http://www.nwriverpartners.org/documents/CongHastingsRemarks-SeaLionIssue-10-16-06.pdf>
- Read Congressman Baird's comments about the Act.
<http://www.nwriverpartners.org/documents/CongressmanBrianBairdComments-SeaLionIssue-10-16-06.pdf>

Northwest RiverPartners is a partnership of farmers, electric utilities and large and small businesses in the Pacific Northwest, joined together to ensure that the Columbia and Snake rivers remain living, working rivers. It was founded on the belief that these rivers are the Northwest's greatest natural resource providing residents with clean and affordable electricity, flood control, irrigation for our farm lands, healthy fish and wildlife, maritime trade, and a multitude of recreational opportunities. For more information about Northwest RiverPartners, visit its Web site at www.nwriverpartners.org.