

Fishermen, Businesses, Salmon Groups Ask Court to Increase Endangered Salmon Survival

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Groups appeal for scientifically supported water releases to get young salmon past big dams



Olympia, WA –Today, a coalition of fishermen and sport fishing associations, partnering with salmon conservation groups, filed an appeal asking a Washington State appeals court to help the downstream migration of endangered salmon.

The appeal seeks to overturn a Superior Court ruling against salmon fishermen, businesses, and advocates in a lawsuit that seeks to ensure that Washington's water quality standards effectively protect salmon and steelhead in the Columbia and Snake Rivers. The groups had asked the Washington Department of Ecology (Ecology) to heed the best available science and revise Washington's existing so-called Total Dissolved Gas (TDG) limits to assist young salmon making their journey to the sea. The case was filed after Ecology refused to do so. The Superior Court [deferred to Ecology's decision](#) and declined to order the agency to change its Clean Water Act standards. Doing so, however, could increase survival rates of migrating salmon by up to nine percent.

"This case seeks to give endangered salmon a significant boost by giving them more of what they need to survive," said Northwest Sportfishing Industry Association (NSIA) Executive Director Liz Hamilton. "The issue of whether we do more for salmon in the Columbia and Snake Rivers is synonymous with whether we're serious about protecting fishing families. It's not just about salmon; it's also about our businesses and all the people they employ because of salmon. The Department of Ecology should not be allowed to ignore mounting science on the benefits of spill for increasing salmon returns."

Ecology's refusal to update its standards has failed endangered salmon by preventing beneficial water releases over dams on the Columbia and Snake Rivers. Releasing -- or "spilling" -- water over the dams, rather than forcing it through turbines and complex bypass systems, is critical to aid endangered migrating salmon and steelhead because it is the safest and best way for young salmon to get to sea.

"Safe spill is a proven, effective action that will help to ensure there will be sustainable salmon runs for the people and communities that depend on them," said Glen Spain of Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations (PCFFA). "The chance to take a single administrative action that could get us up to 9% more salmon survival is significant and should be a no-brainer. Ecology's refusal to make this standard more beneficial to salmon is a missed opportunity."

"It's unfortunate that we're arguing with Ecology about this when every fisheries manager in the region – including Ecology's counterpart agency in Oregon – agrees that making the standard more protective is necessary to help endangered salmon," said Earthjustice attorney Steve Mashuda. "We're continuing the fight and hope Washington will soon adopt a common-sense, biologically-sound approach to give endangered salmon a better chance of surviving."

In addition to increasing salmon survival, the increase in spill at the dams could also help to avoid curtailing wind energy in the future, as the Bonneville Power Administration has done this spring in an attempt to diminish over-generation concerns for the power grid.

"Safe spill is a clear winner for both salmon and clean, salmon-friendly wind power," said Kevin Lewis, Conservation Director of Idaho Rivers United. "Changing Washington's standards to better protect salmon would help wind farms sell their power during high water periods and help alleviate some of the wind power cutoffs that Bonneville Power Administration has planned for the future."

A ruling in the appeal filed today could occur early in 2012.

