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Testimony from the Northwest Sportfishing Industry Association
before the

House Committee on Natural Resources,
Water, Power and Oceans Subcommittee

On H.R. 2083

Thursday, June 8, 2017

Honorable Chair Lamborn and members of the Water, Power and Ocean Subcommittee for Natural Resources,

On behalf of the Northwest Sportfishing Industry Association (NSIA), I am writing in support of HR 2083, the Endangered Salmon and Fisheries Predation Prevention Act. NSIA is a trade organization, consisting of over 300 businesses in the northwest and beyond dedicated to the preservation, restoration and enhancement of sport fisheries and the businesses dependent upon them.

In the Northwest, sportfishing means business. According to the last U.S. Fish and Wildlife Survey, sportfishing in Idaho, Oregon and Washington generates nearly \$4 billion annually in economic benefits, in service of over 2 million customers who spend 2.6 million days fishing throughout the year. According to USFWS 34,500 jobs are sustained by the activity. As the largest producer of salmon, steelhead and sturgeon populations in the world, the Columbia Basin fisheries are vital to the success of our industry. Sealion consumption of salmon, steelhead and sturgeon, as well as sealion harassment of those who fish is having a negative effect on the current and future health of the Sportfishing industry.

Northwest sportfishing for salmon and steelhead is more than an economic engine and a cultural birthright, it is a funding source for conservation. License fees, collected primarily through NSIA retailers, fund much of the conservation mission at the fish and wild life agencies. In addition, our industry pays a federal excise tax on manufactured goods that is returned to the states through the Sport Fish Restoration fund. Even for those who do not fish, salmon are an ever-present icon--seen on our license plates, on buildings and artwork everywhere. For the Native American Tribes in the northwest, salmon are a sacred part of their culture.

The Pacific Northwest is so committed to the protection and restoration of our fishery resources that every state has promulgated laws to ensure that each of us do our part to lessen or mitigate the impact of our activities on fish and their habitats. Sport, commercial and tribal fisheries are heavily regulated. Forestry, hydropower and agriculture all have regulations to protect water quality, temperature and quantity. Nearly every activity is managed to minimize the effects on salmonids life history. All can be costly to the

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and the businesses dependent upon them. Call toll free: 1-866-315-NSIA

regulated industry, yet the consumption of salmon and steelhead by marine mammals grows, nearly unchecked, at an alarming rate.

Others will provide testimony regarding the consumption rates on ESA-listed salmon in the Columbia River below Bonneville, which is extensive and well documented, therefore I will primarily focus on the Willamette River a tributary of the Columbia that flows through Portland, Oregon.

One of the most serious examples of the escalating consumption of Endangered Species Act (ESA) listed salmon and steelhead occurs at Willamette Falls in Oregon City, approximately 130 miles from the Pacific Ocean. Willamette Falls is a large (40 feet high by 1500 feet wide) natural barrier that migrating salmon and steelhead require very high-water conditions or a fish ladder to traverse and return to their natal spawning streams. This barrier, like Bonneville Dam in the Columbia River, causes the migrating fish to pause, concentrating them in a small area as they seek their best passageway upstream. Unable to escape or go elsewhere, they are trapped like sitting ducks for the growing numbers of sealions congregating below the falls in Oregon City. I fished in this area with my family for over 30 years and watched firsthand the arrival, then growth in numbers of marine mammals and the growing consumption of steelhead, salmon and sturgeon.

According to the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, ten years ago, wild winter steelhead were nearing delisting status under the ESA. During those ten years, little has changed for the quality of habitat in the Willamette River, but the sealion population and their proportional effect on the number of returning winter steelhead has expanded. In 2015 and 2106, an estimated 15% of the total population of winter steelhead were consumed in the Willamette River directly below the falls. The initial (and still draft) estimate for the consumption rate on the the 2017 winter steelhead migration has ballooned to 25%.

This 25% consumption rate is especially disturbing as the winter steelhead run has collapsed to one-tenth of the 10-year average, down to less than 1,000 fish. We fear the sealions will consume this race of fish to extinction, much as they did to the steelhead in the mid 1990's at Ballard Locks, near Seattle Washington, due to ineffective actions that occurred too late to prevent the catastrophe.

According to Chris Kern at ODFW, ***“PRELIMINARY estimate, based on past sampling rates and geographic area expansions, is approximately 2500 total salmonids (salmon and steelhead combined) from January – late May, mouth of Clackamas up to Willamette Falls. This estimate may increase once final analyses are completed, at which time we will also have an estimate of the breakdown of species and run type within the estimate.”***

Aside from the very significant impact sealions have on ESA listed salmon and steelhead, and their growing consumption on sturgeon, there is the issue of human safety. Nearly everyone paying attention to this issue saw the video this year of a young girl pulled off a dock by a sealion. Many docks in Astoria, Oregon City and other areas are overcome by dozens of these enormous creatures, rendering them unsafe for humans to use. Last year a father and his 9-year-old son had their water craft flipped over by a sealion in Oregon City. These reports of dangerous interactions grow each year as more sealions follow each other 130 miles upriver.

One year a sealion nearly swamped our boat that was tied to a dock when the sealion tried to climb into the back of our boat from the dock. Other dangerous interactions occur during fishing. In the Columbia, sport anglers are required (as best practices) to release wild salmon and steelhead unharmed by not removing them from the water. Hatchery fish have a mark, and are netted and brought into the boat. Wild fish are released. It is dangerous lean over the side of a boat releasing a wild fish gently from a hook with numerous sealions patrolling to take your fish. The loss of fingers, or to be pulled overboard are very real hazards.

HR 2083 alters the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972 to allow for management of a species that has experienced tremendous recovery over the last 45 years. Many would credit the MMPA with creating an overpopulation of the California sealions. It's long past time for an amendment to the MMPA to prevent an outcome whereby the protection of one species precipitates the extinction of another. HR 2083 may not be perfect, but it does provide more tools to manage the deleterious effects of marine mammals on ESA-listed stocks. Our state and local governments, together with the Federal Government and many non-governmental organizations have been working in partnership to protect the iconic salmon and steelhead in the pacific northwest. Overpopulation of California sealions should not continue to interfere with and, in some places, obliterate our efforts.

Thank you for your serious consideration of HR 2083. We pray it passes in some form that will help our fishery resources. It can't be soon enough. Do not hesitate to contact our office if we can be a resource.

In Service,



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