



Washington State Senate

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January 6, 2017

Dr. Bradley Smith, Chairman
Washington Fish & Wildlife Commission
600 Capitol Way N.
Olympia, WA 98501

James Unsworth, Director
WA Dept. of Fish & Wildlife
600 Capitol Way N.
Olympia, WA 98501

Dear Chairman Smith and Director Unsworth:

It has come to my attention that the Fish and Wildlife Commission is set to review the bi-state management policy for Columbia River Basin Salmon. I would like to express my strong support for continuing the fishery reforms that enhance conservation while also preserving the basin's recreational fisheries.

The current management policy for the Columbia River Basin was created in 2012, when regulators from Washington and Oregon agreed to collaborative plan that increased cooperation between the states and resolved much of the controversy surrounding the use of gillnets at the mouth of the river. Though support for the bi-state and bi-partisan reforms have been widespread, unfortunately there are currently concerns that Oregon is moving to abandon crucial elements of the plan before they are fully implemented in 2017, including allowing the continued use of non-selective commercial gillnets in the mainstem Columbia.

Unfortunately, these changes have the potential to inflict lasting damage to both the long-term conservation efforts to protect these fisheries and the State's economy. Each year, Washington sells over 200,000 Columbia River endorsements to recreational anglers. When coupled with the revenue derived from fishing licenses and other taxes on fishing-related equipment, Columbia River recreational salmon fisheries generate over ten million dollars in annual revenue to fund the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife's budget. However, the River's recreational salmon fisheries – which are primary focused on hatchery salmon through mark-selective fishing practices - are often constrained by non-selective commercial gillnet fisheries. Additionally, the continued use of non-selective commercial gillnets in the mainstem of the Columbia hampers conservation efforts for the 13 endangered species of salmon and steelhead that inhabit the Columbia River basin.

Chairman Smith and Director Unsworth

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In light of these consequences, I strongly urge Washington's Fish and Wildlife Commission to reject this effort to undo the reforms and to implement the management plan as originally agreed upon.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andy Billig." The signature is written in a cursive style with a period at the end.

Senator Andy Billig
3rd Legislative District - Spokane