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U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, DC 20515

Opening Statement of
Chairman Doc Hastings

Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife, Oceans, and Insular Affairs

On Thursday, June 13, 2013

1324 Longworth House Office Building Subcommittee

Legislative Hearing on H.R. 553, H.R. 1308, H.R. 1399, H.R. 1425, H.R. 1491, and H.R. 2219

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Thank you, Chairman Fleming for holding this hearing on H.R. 1308, the Endangered Salmon Predation Prevention Act.

As you know, this measure, in varying forms that I and other Northwest colleagues have introduced, has already passed this Committee and the House several times. Yet, it remains as important of a bill today as the first time it was introduced.

Northwest citizens invest close to \$1 billion annually through their electricity bills and other federal and state taxpayer-funded programs to help protect several sub-species of salmon and steelhead that the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration has listed under the Endangered Species Act.

Nearly half of the 28 listed salmon populations migrate to and from the Pacific Ocean and the Columbia and Snake Rivers. Significant regional efforts have improved fish passage and survival while allowing continued operation of several federal hydropower dams. This effort is supported by the Administration, the states of Washington, Idaho and Montana, and several upper and lower Columbia River tribes.

Great progress has been made to recover salmon, as witnessed by the return of well over 1 million total adult salmon to Bonneville Dam over each of the past four years. At the same time, growing numbers of aggressive sea lions are consuming more endangered salmon.

According to the States of Washington and Oregon, as many as 1,000 California sea lions have gathered below Bonneville Dam during certain years, and consume as much as 20 percent or more of the adult salmon that return in the spring.

Despite extensive efforts by federal, state, and tribal officials to discourage predation, the Army Corps of Engineers estimates that sea lions have consumed over 42,000 salmon over the past decade. In addition, steller sea lions are dramatically impacting salmon and non-listed species important to tribes and fishermen, including sturgeon and lamprey.

Repeated processes under the National Environmental Policy Act, including multiple task forces led by NOAA comprised of federal, state and tribal scientists, have concluded that non-lethal efforts authorized under Section 120 have been ineffective at controlling sea lions from preying on salmon.

Since 2006, states have requested authority to lethally take a limited number of aggressive sea lions. Despite two federal courts, including the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals affirming lethal take authority, certain environmental groups, including one represented here today, have continued to file lawsuits.

Earlier this year, an Oregon federal court judge denied their latest attempt to block this authority, and NOAA granted permits to the states of Oregon, Washington and Idaho. The Wild Fish Conservancy and the Humane Society has appealed yet again. Costly and time-consuming lawsuits are not helping the salmon. Instead, they continue to hinder science-supported efforts to control sea lions that we know are seriously impacting salmon.

H.R. 1308 allows a common sense path forward to protect our substantial investment in salmon recovery and provide federal, state, and tribal fish managers the tools necessary to control sea lions.

This bipartisan legislation would ensure that states and tribes have the necessary authority to manage the sea lion problem while the states obtain longer-term authority through the Marine Mammal Protection Act.

I look forward to hearing the testimony from Mr. Norman from the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. In addition to Washington, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife similarly supports H.R. 1308.

I also want to thank the Columbia River Intertribal Fish Commission for their support for the bill, and I ask that their written statement endorsing identical legislation in the previous Congress be submitted for the record.

I again thank the Subcommittee for holding this hearing.