

Committee on Resources

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Ralph Brown Testimony

Good morning, Mr. Chairman and members of the Sub-committee.

I am Ralph Brown of Brookings, Oregon. I wear several hats at this hearing. I am a County Commissioner from Curry County. I sit on the Pacific Fisheries Management Council, and own fishing vessels that fish out of the Port of Brookings-Harbor.

I want to make it clear that, although I grew up in the salmon fishing industry, I do not fish for salmon in my fishing business now. The truth is that I know very little about the biology of salmon in fresh water or of the hydrology of the Klamath River. Some people in the fishing business will think that I am a strange choice to speak on Klamath issues because of this and, to some degree, it is a valid criticism. I do have over twenty years resource management experience however.

My interest in the Klamath River grows out of my fishery management experience, out of the impact that the management of Klamath salmon has had on the communities of Curry County, and out of several attempts to hold meetings between Klamath Farmers and Fishermen.

Management of Klamath River salmon has had a tremendous impact on the communities of what we call the Klamath Management Zone. This zone runs from below Eureka, California to north of Gold Beach, Oregon. We have intentionally moved most of the commercial salmon fishery out of this area, and reduced the recreational fishery.

Salmon fishery management essentially consists of mapping the various runs of fish by time and area. We try to find locations and seasons for the fishery that allow harvests of abundant runs while keeping the harvests of stocks of concern below allowable levels, such that all runs are fished at capacity but not over harvested. Runs of concern consist of both those on the threatened or endangered list and some that are simply vulnerable to over fishing due to the timing and location of the run. We have management concerns with several of the runs on the Klamath River. Coho are listed under the Endangered Species act, of course, but most of our management has been aimed at another species, Fall-run Chinook. This fish has been a major constraint to salmon fisheries along the Coast and management of it has had a large impact on the communities of the Klamath Management Zone.

During summer months, Klamath River Fall Chinook are found from San Francisco to the Columbia River. Percentages of Klamath Fish found in the catch are highest near the mouth of the Klamath River and taper to low levels with greater distances from the River. The area where the percentage of Klamath River catches is the highest is the Klamath Management Zone. Catch is limited in this area in order to allow access to more abundant runs in other areas.

When I was a child, the Klamath Management Zone was one of the most popular fishing areas along the Coast. Hundreds of commercial fishing boats from Seattle to San Francisco would spend their summers fishing, and selling their catch, in the area. Ports had processing facilities all along the shoreline of the harbors. Today there are very few salmon boats that fish in the area. There are no major processors, only buying stations, located in the Ports of Gold Beach, Brookings, Crescent City or Trinidad.

Thousand of recreational fishermen would come to these ports to fish in the summer. We have only had full recreational fishing seasons during the last two summers following nearly complete closures for much of the 1980's and 1990's.

The number of commercial salmon fishing boats on the West Coast has dropped from nearly 10,000 during the 1970's to only about 1,000 active vessels today. Much of the restriction that brought this decline was due to Klamath salmon abundances, and management restrictions that were necessary on other more abundant runs to insure that catches of Klamath Fall Chinook were kept at allowable levels. The hardships

caused by this reduction in salmon fishing along the Coast are fresh in the minds of Coastal residents and in the salmon industry. We do not want to see a repeat of this disaster.

My interest in getting fishermen and farmers together was the result of a meeting with Representative Walden. A couple of years ago, I crowded my way into a meeting with Congressman Walden concerning reauthorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. We were sitting there explaining to the Congressman our problems with lawsuits by environmental groups over NEPA processes, our problems with inadequate data and science and overly restrictive management as a result, when he commented that we sounded just like a bunch of Klamath farmers. He said that the conversation that we were having was identical to conversations with the Klamath Farmers, and yet farmers and fishermen were at each other's throats all of the time. We agreed that farmers and fishermen probably had more in common than we had differences if we ever sat down and talked, and got to know each other. He asked me to try to find a way to bring fishermen and farmers together.

I'm not sure that I would have followed up on this but when I got home from Washington D. C. I found a message from Dan Keppan, of the Klamath Water Users Association, on my answering machine. He had been contacted by Representative Walden's staff and given a report on the discussion we had. Dan and I had our first meeting in Klamath Falls shortly after.

In talking to Dan it was apparent that fishermen and farmers, as resource users, have many common issues. We agreed to try to hold a series of meetings between the fishing and farming communities and see if we could establish communication such that our common interests could be established and perhaps allow a more rational discourse on our differences.

Along the Coast spanning the Klamath Fishery Management Zone, a coalition of interested fishing groups, Ports and local Governments has been formed. This is the Klamath Zone Fisheries Coalition. The Klamath Zone Fisheries Coalition seemed like a natural place to start so I contacted them and interested them in joining in the discourse.

We have had several meetings. One of these included a tour of the Klamath Water Project and one was a tour of the fishing industry in Curry and Del Norte counties. Our last meeting was held at a Pacific Fishery Management Council meeting where representatives of the Klamath Water Users Association also had an audience with the Management Councils Habitat Committee.

For me, the tour of the Water Project was enlightening. I left feeling that I had a much better understanding of the pride that the farmers felt in the project and a better understanding of their view of the history of the river. I recommend this tour to anyone with an interest in water issues in the area.

I hope that the tour of the fishing industry gave the farmers a similar understanding of the importance of the salmon fishery to us and gave them some feel of the hardship that we have already felt.

Even when trying to get along and understand each other it is sometime difficult for fishermen and farmers to have a discussion that doesn't rub against raw wounds. Farmers and fishermen have differing views of the world and differing views of this situation in particular. The animosities and fears of both groups are real, intense and barely concealed beneath some very thin skin. Simple words like "fish die-off" or "fish kill" have different connotations to fishermen and farmers. Fishermen innocently using the term "fish kill" can cause a very visible reaction from a farmer as the farmer interprets this as finger pointing at them. For fishermen, the term "die-off" implies that there was no cause and therefore no reason to take corrective action. Farmers feel threatened by the potential of water curtailments but fishermen remember the hard times and feel threatened by anything that might harm fish. The participants of the meetings that we have had seem to be somewhat better able to look past this.

I have found a great deal of interest among individuals in continuing these meetings and in continuing to expand the circle of participants. Until the circle of participants is expanded considerably, the meetings will not significantly change the debate over the condition of the river. Funding to continue these meetings has become a problem, and finding a group that has the trust of both the farmers and fishermen to organize and take the lead is challenging.

I suspect that the Klamath Taskforce was intended to fulfill this niche, but for some reason this is not working. We need to have a discussion of the Taskforce process to see why it doesn't seem to be working and to see if we can get a process in place that has the function of bringing people together toward a better

understanding of each other and of the problem.

I am going to conclude with some almost random observations that I have made during the meeting process.

Although Coho and steelhead are the listed species, in many ways, the river is managed for fall run Chinook. Ocean management is clearly centered on fall run Chinook and shortages of fall run Chinook are what caused much of the curtailment of salmon fisheries in the ocean. The fish that died a few years ago were predominately fall run Chinook. Often when Salmon fishermen are expressing concern for salmon on the river it is not the listed species that is being talked about. It is fall run Chinook.

Similarly, Coastal fishermen often talk about the Klamath River but mean the entire watershed, not just the main stem. Most of the fishermen that I talk to are convinced that the Trinity River is as important as the main stem of the Klamath to the health of salmon in the system. We strongly support a system-wide, watershed approach to examinations of the river. We need to deal with the entire watershed, not just part of it.

Finally, when dealing with the management of a wild species, such as salmon, we usually are not trying to change the behavior of the species but of the people that interact with the species. We are trying to change behaviors that have caused species to decline. These may be direct takes, such as in fishing or hunting, or may be indirect takes through changes in habitat, but in each case we are trying to change human behaviors. We would be better off if we kept that in the fore front of our thoughts as we discuss these issues.

We seem to rely primarily on coercive rules to change behaviors. This often has the effect of producing resentment, and resistance, to the regulations and to the regulators. We need to pay more attention to the social and economic conditions that influence behavior and look for incentives and inducements to pull people into behavior change, not just penalties, that push people to change.

I short my recommendation for the Klamath River is to remember that we are trying to change people. We need to remember that we are dealing with good hearted, well meaning individuals on all sides, but people that have differing understanding of the issues and of the solutions and goals. We need to examine our process to insure that they promote better understanding of each other, and that they promote development of common goals. We need to be sure that we examine our methods of promoting behavior change and whenever possible use incentives and inducements not just coercion.