

Washington, DC – A bi-partisan group of more than 100 legislators led by Congressman Earl Blumenauer (D-Ore.) and Congressman Tom Petri (R-Wis.), Peter DeFazio (D-Ore.), Christopher Shays (R-Conn.), and Jim McDermott (D-Wash.) today urged President Bush to revise the administration's latest salmon recovery plan to ensure significant recovery of salmon and steelhead in the Columbia and Snake River Basin. The current plan, a redraft of an earlier version thrown out by the courts, has been widely criticized by environmental groups, scientists and fishermen for failing to provide for the recovery of self-sustaining, harvestable populations of salmon.

“For too long, we have treated the Columbia River and its tributaries like a machine,” said Blumenauer. “We can no longer enact policies that result in the status quo for the river, and the fish and wildlife species that inhabit it. The Federal Government's numerous legal obligations to recover salmon mandate that any action we take must leave the river and these fish in better shape than before.”

In 2000, NOAA Fisheries unveiled its plan to mitigate for damage done to salmon and steelhead runs in the Columbia and Snake River basins by the region's hydroelectric dams, as required under the Endangered Species Act. Called the “Biological Opinion,” the administration's plan was challenged in court and in 2003, a federal judge ordered NOAA Fisheries to redraft it. The latest draft plan makes the unprecedented assumption that dams don't put salmon in jeopardy, and ensures only the bare survival of salmon, not their recovery.

“Restoring salmon and steelhead in the Columbia and Snake River Basin is of national importance and a high priority,” said the lawmakers in their letter to President Bush. “The new draft Biological Opinion does not ensure self-sustaining, harvestable populations, by relying on legal technicalities to justify not having to fully mitigate for the operations of the hydropower system. Rather than settle for a Biological Opinion that redefines the problem instead of fixes it, we urge you to direct federal agencies to revise this draft to ensure significant recovery of salmon and steelhead.”

The lawmakers point out that restoring salmon and steelhead runs will preserve economic benefits. The Northwest salmon and steelhead industry accounts for more than 36,000 jobs in the Western United States and generates more than \$3 billion in Western economies annually.

The letter concludes that if the current plan is adopted, “We risk our past and future investments in one of the nation's greatest national treasures, the wild salmon and steelhead

of the Pacific Northwest.”

The letter has the support of Save Our Wild Salmon, Taxpayers for Common Sense, U.S. PIRG, the Northwest Sportfishing Industry Association, American Rivers and a coalition of other environmental and fishing groups. A copy of the letter follows:

“Dear Mr. President:

“Restoring salmon and steelhead in the Columbia and Snake River Basin is of national importance and a high priority. We recognize the crucial significance of preserving the economic and environmental benefits that these species provide. The salmon and steelhead industry account for more than 36,000 fishing jobs from California to Alaska and inland to Idaho and bring more than \$3 billion into rural Western economies annually.

“The Federal Action Agencies were given the opportunity to draft a new Biological Opinion that protects salmon without harming ratepayers in the Northwest. Instead, the new draft Biological Opinion, released September 9, 2004 by NOAA Fisheries, does not ensure self-sustaining, harvestable populations, by relying on legal technicalities to justify not having to fully mitigate for the operation of the hydropower system. Consequently, this draft, if enacted, could place an even greater liability on thousands of West Coast fishermen, and millions of federal taxpayers. We have already spent more than a decade and over \$4.5 billion on salmon recovery in the Columbia and Snake River Basin. The new draft would cost \$600 million a year just to keep salmon on the brink of extinction instead of headed for improved survival rates and recovery.

“Rather than settle for a Biological Opinion that redefines the problem instead of fixes it, we urge you to direct federal agencies to revise this draft to ensure significant recovery of salmon and steelhead in the Columbia and Snake River Basin. A new Biological Opinion must also recognize the Federal Government's numerous legal and tribal treaty obligations to recover salmon and take adequate action to leave the river and fish in better shape than before. This plan must be biologically, legally, and fiscally defensible. We recognize the need to protect ratepayers and the economy of the Northwest, and urge that all scientifically and economically credible options that meet these goals be considered in the plan. As it is now, we risk our past and future investments in one of the nation's greatest national treasures, the wild salmon and steelhead of the Pacific Northwest.”

Lawmakers Urge Redraft Of Salmon Recovery Plan

Monday, 11 October 2004 13:00
