

Are sea lions more important than fish?

3,500 fish were killed this year, estimates suggest

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The next step in the long federal process of dealing with predatory sea lions munching on federally protected salmon and steelhead at Bonneville Dam is Sept. 4 and 5 in Portland.

That's when the newly appointed 18-person panel meets to look at a request by officials in Oregon, Washington and Idaho to kill a select number of sea lions near the fish ladder at the Columbia River dam.

"I was honored to be selected for that," said Dennis Richey of West Linn. "However, at the same time, I've got mixed feelings."

That's due in part, the executive director of Oregon Anglers said, because he's the lone sportfishing representative on the panel.

"I firmly believe that the process should be more well-balanced," Richey said. "But at the same time, I know a number of the people representing Oregon, Washington and Idaho, and I know they're fully convinced of the need for this."

It's a case of species protected by the federal Marine Mammal Protection Act feasting on fish that are listed under the Endangered Species Act.

Officials with the three states have asked for a permit under a 1994 amendment, Section 120, of the Marine Mammal Act to take identifiable sea lions that find the narrow throat of the fish ladders at Bonneville a veritable seafood buffet.

Federal biologists estimate that sea lions took about 3,500 salmon and steelhead this year, about 4 percent of the spawning run at the ladders.

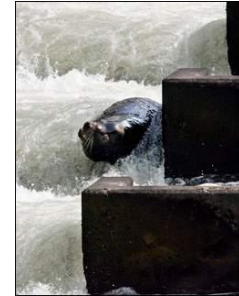
A large share of those fish are listed upriver spring chinook salmon bound for the upper Columbia and Snake rivers.

Along with Richey, other members announced by NOAA Fisheries officials are: Daryl Boness, Marine Mammal Commission; Bruce Buckmaster, Salmon for All; Jody Calica, Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation; Robert Delong, NOAA Fisheries Service National Marine Mammal Laboratory; Patricia Dornbusch, NOAA Fisheries Service Northwest Region Salmon Recovery Division; Doug Hatch, Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission; Tom Loughlin, an independent marine mammal scientist; Debrah Marriott, Lower Columbia River Estuary Partnership; Barry McPherson, Oregon Chapter, American Fisheries Society; Guy Norman, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife; Joe Oatman, Nez Perce Tribes; Carl Scheeler, Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation; Tony Vecchio, Oregon Zoo; Paul Ward, Confederated Bands of the Yakama Nation; Steve Williams, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife; Bob Willis, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; and Sharon Young, Humane Society of the United States.

"Frankly, I expect the dissenting opinions to be few and far between, because this is out in the public purview," Richey said about news reports and other information that's out there. "There's a whole lot of people out there who see the sea lions as needing some kind of control."

The formal name of the group is the Pinniped-Fishery Interaction Task Force.

With the Sept. 4 and 5 meetings the first of three two-day sessions, the group is on a tight deadline.



They have 60 days to make recommendations to NOAA Fisheries.

Background

For more online about Section 120 of the Marine Mammal Protection Act, visit <http://www.nwr.noaa.gov/Marine-Mammals/Seals-and-Sea-Lions/States-MMPA-Request.cfm>

Task force

What: The first gathering of the 18-member Pinniped-Fishery Interaction Task Force.

When: 9:30 p.m. Sept. 4 and 5.

Where: Doubletree Hotel & Executive Meeting Center, 1000 NE Multnomah St., Portland (next to Lloyd Center).

Input: Time has been set aside for people to offer further scientific information. The open-comment period was held between the petition filing by the states and the meeting of the task force.