

# The Columbian

## In our view: Lethal Force

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### Sea lions drive officials toward tough choices

The stereotypical behavior of Californians that aggravates many Northwesterners is manifested in more than just humans, in fact in ravenous pinnipeds.

California sea lions have been feasting on dwindling runs of salmon in the Columbia River, and numerous stakeholders are urging that the invaders be taken out by lethal force to protect the fish.

The problem has become so severe that a new study group was formed earlier this year. The Pinniped-Fishery Interaction Task Force will meet for the first time on Tuesday in Portland (9:30 a.m. at the Lloyd Center DoubleTree Hotel, 1000 N.E. Multnomah St.). Included are representatives from government agencies, Indian tribes, fishing groups, the Oregon Zoo and the Humane Society of the United States. Their task is to recommend to the National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration whether or not some sea lions, which are protected under the 1972 Marine Mammal Protection Act, should be killed by a method yet to be determined.

As we have editorialized before, the recommendation can be condensed to three words: lock and load.

Controlling the population of one species to protect another is not unheard-of in government wildlife work, and the California sea lion has far outgrown its protected status. (Fewer than 1,500 were counted around California in the 1970s, but now the population has grown to more than 200,000.)

The problem has become especially threatening to tribal livelihoods. Fidelia Andy, chairwoman of the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission, testified this month before the House Natural Resources subcommittee that sea lions this spring devoured at least 3,500 fish, and the total might have been much higher. "If we return to using the same failed tactics we use today, then it will be difficult to answer to the region, the region's fishermen and the taxpayers who have invested in salmon restoration," she said.

Animal-rights activists no doubt will protest lethal tactics, but when viewed in the context of protecting threatened salmon runs, this solution appears logical and necessary.

The task force would do well to examine HR 1769, the bipartisan legislation sponsored by U.S. Rep. Brian Baird, D-Vancouver, and U.S. Rep. Doc Hastings, R-Pasco, that would fast-track permission to kill sea lions. Baird also said this week that another species of sea lion, the Stellar, is killing sturgeon in the Columbia River. For now, though, getting the California sea lions away from the salmon should be the first priority.