



Current Reflections

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Save Thousands of Prized Salmon and Steelhead

Sea Lion proposal could save thousands of salmon

The task of preserving the region's prized and endangered salmon and steelhead stocks is one that can only be accomplished by a comprehensive effort addressing all obstacles to success. And, voracious California sea lions have become a significant threat to salmon returning to the Columbia River each spring.

The wide-ranging sea lions are taking as many as 13,000 returning salmon each spring in the Columbia River - nearly 3,000 at Bonneville Dam. The returning female salmon carry 5,000 or more eggs as they attempt to return to spawning grounds to create the next generation.

Tribal, state and federal biologists have done everything allowable under current law to give the Columbia River salmon a chance against the sea lions. However, between 2002 and 2007, the number of salmon eaten by sea lions has increased 382 percent.



ODFW Photo

Sea lions now account for upwards of 4% mortality of spring chinook and steelhead migrating past the dam, and non-lethal methods have proven ineffective. Under federal protection, the sea lion population has been increasing 5 per cent annually to a point where a recent draft status report indicates they are above maximum sustainable population levels.

In comments to NOAA-Fisheries supporting the removal program, Terry Flores, executive director notes "While killing these animals is our last choice, it is a necessary one. Significant investments are being made throughout the Columbia River basin to protect and enhance salmon and steelhead populations."

The recommendation for killing the 30 sea lions that are the worst offenders emerged with just one dissenting vote from a task force of diverse interests including independent scientists, conservationists, river users, the tribes and federal and state agencies. Arriving at the

recommendation for lethal removal, the task force, relying on the best science available, concluded that California sea lions are having a significant negative effect on endangered fish. .

In a recent opinion editorial published in the Seattle Times, Fidelia Andy, chairwoman of the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission and vice chairwoman of the Yakama Nation's Fish and Wildlife Committee, comments: “Quasi-domesticated sea lions may be acceptable to the Pier 39 tourists in San Francisco, but not on the Columbia River. There is no nobility in one species squatting in a fish ladder and eating another into extinction.” She continued, “Our Creator gave us the responsibility to protect the balance among all creatures in the ecosystem...Failure to accept this responsibility threatens a tragic loss of a cultural resource that is the symbol of the Northwest”.

While other efforts to recover our salmon and steelhead runs are just as important, this recommendation on the sea lions will make a significant contribution to this vital task.

NOAA Fisheries Service [draft environmental assessment on the states' request](#) for authority to lethally remove California sea lions that feed on ESA-listed salmon in the Columbia River Basin.
[Northwest RiverPartners comments](#) to NOAA Fisheries Service regarding lethally removing California sea lions.
[Don Brunell Opinion Editorial – The Columbian](#) - Sea Lion story may have unhappy ending for fish.

Northwest RiverPartners is a partnership of farmers, electric utilities and large and small businesses in the Pacific Northwest, joined together to ensure that the Columbia and Snake rivers remain living, working rivers. It was founded on the belief that these rivers are the Northwest's greatest natural resource providing residents with clean, affordable and renewable electricity, flood control, irrigation for our farm lands, healthy fish and wildlife, maritime trade, and a multitude of recreational opportunities. For more information, please visit www.nwriverpartners.org.