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## *Reducing the Risks and Maximizing the Benefits*

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Over the past 150 years, Oregon's naturally produced native salmon and steelhead have declined in historical abundance leading to many stocks being listed as threatened or endangered under the provisions of the federal Endangered Species Act. A myriad of human activities including consumptive fisheries, habitat alterations, hydroelectric development, flood control dams, water diversions, hatchery practices, predation and reduced water quality have been scientifically identified as imposing significant ecological risks to the long term viability of the Pacific Northwest's native salmonids. For more than a century, hatcheries have been the management tool utilized to meet sport and commercial harvest objectives and compensate for fish losses caused by human activities.

In 2000, based upon growing concern surrounding the impacts that historic hatchery practices were having on wild populations, the U.S. Congress funded the Pacific Northwest Hatchery Reform project and resultant Hatchery Scientific Review Group (HSRG). The reform project recognized that while hatcheries play a key role in meeting harvest and conservation goals for salmon and steelhead, historic hatchery practices needed a comprehensive analysis that would scientifically identify the risks hatchery fish pose to wild fish. The guiding principles of hatchery reform is that fisheries management should be centered on ecosystem-based principles and that harvest objectives are sustainable only if they are compatible with conservation of natural reproducing salmon, steelhead and trout.

In 2003, the Oregon Legislative Assembly recognized the biological, economic and cultural importance for a state-of-the-art cooperative experimental laboratory capable of determining through applied research the best management practices for Oregon's 33 hatcheries. Today's best management practices for hatchery operations are distinctly different from yesteryear when maximizing the in-hatchery survival and the number of fish released was the primary management objective. Contemporary best management practices recognize the heightened expectation for our hatcheries to be ecologically compatible with host watersheds through scientifically designed programs that optimize the number of fish available for commercial and sport harvest while minimizing negative effects on wild salmonids.

The Oregon Hatchery Research Center (OHRC), originally known as the Fall Creek Hatchery Research Center, is located on Fall Creek, a major tributary of the Alsea River fifteen miles west of the small coast range community of Alsea. The OHRC is the result of the vision and effort of Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife fishery manager's recognition that change was rapidly occurring across the Pacific Northwest's hatchery management landscape. Oregon was best positioned to identify and answer questions vital to the success of the Oregon Plan, the Native Fish Conservation Policy and the Hatchery and Genetic Management Policy in a manner that allowed for sustainable commercial and sport harvest fisheries.

From the OHRC's Grand Opening on October 14, 2005 to the present, the OHRC's mission statement remains consistent; "Develop an understanding of the mechanisms that may create differences between hatchery and wild fish and devise ways to reduce and manage the differences so that hatcheries can be used responsibly in the conservation and use of Oregon's native fish."

The goals of the OHRC are the same as the Hatchery Scientific Review Group (HSRG).

These six goals are:

1. Establish the scientific foundations for fish hatcheries and cooperative programs
2. Conserve genetic resources for salmonid species
3. Assist with the recovery of naturally spawning populations;
4. Provide for sustainable fisheries
5. Conduct applied scientific research
6. Improve quality and cost-effectiveness of hatchery programs

Critics of Oregon's hatchery management programs state that OHRC research conducted on the above goals is mythical and that hatchery fish are always biologically inferior to wild fish. They say that hatcheries should be immediately boarded up and that they are just another failed experiment in man's quest to conquer and control the environment. However, sport anglers and commercial fishermen, the most vociferous champions for healthy rivers, fish and conservation, believe that science-based risk management can benefit fish and society. Sport and commercial fishing should not become collateral damage in the wild vs. hatchery political debate.

HB 3441 strengthens the scientific contributions of the Oregon Hatchery Research Center to Oregon's ongoing effort to provide science based wildlife management that provides optimum recreational benefits and prevents serious depletion of any indigenous species.

Stan Steele, President  
Oregon Outdoor Council