



# NATIVE FISH SOCIETY

*Advancing the Recovery of Native, Wild Fish in Their Homewaters*

February 26, 2015

## **Testimony to the House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources HB 2808**

The Native Fish Society (NFS) is a regional wild fish advocacy organization with several hundred members in Oregon. Our mission is to protect and restore wild native fish and the habitats that sustain them.

Native western juniper is a very hearty and valuable tree species that survives in some of the harshest climates that Oregon has to offer. The value of these juniper woodlands to dozens of native birds and animals cannot be overstated. In many areas of central and eastern Oregon, juniper is the only tree on the landscape and is critical to the survival of numerous species of mammals and birds. For many streams in this area of the state, junipers are the only tree providing stability and shading to streams and preventing serious soil losses in high water events.

The range of juniper has been increasing in recent decades. Some of this expansion may be related to gradual changes in the climate. However, the cause for much of the expansion that has occurred in the last 150 years can be traced to the introduction of domestic livestock and the suppression of naturally occurring wild fires. Removing massive amounts of juniper from the landscape without dealing with the underlying causes at the root of the problem are only a temporary Band-Aid solution.

The Native Fish Society does support the active management of native juniper from areas determined to be of high value to the protection and restoration of the sage grouse, which is on the verge of a federal listing under the Endangered Species Act. But removing thousands of acres of juniper in areas not considered to be critical habitat for the grouse is primarily an effort to provide additional forage for domestic livestock. That may be a reasonable approach to take on certain private lands but not a very wise solution for the future management of our public lands. In addition, NFS questions the wisdom of using limited public dollars for this purpose when there are so many other more important public uses for those dollars. We believe that most activities on private land that primarily benefit livestock operators should be paid for by the landowners and not the general public.

Our specific concerns about HB 2808 relate to Sections 2 and 3 of the bill. While we support the development of additional markets for juniper, providing public funds in the form of grants for these purposes may not provide much of a benefit to the public at large. We need some assurance that these harvesting activities will come under the regulatory jurisdiction of the Oregon Department of Forestry and the Oregon Forest Practices Act. While the Act certainly has its shortcomings, it does provide a mechanism for the state to review harvest plans and provides a certain level of protection for areas adjacent to streams. Allowing the State Forester to bypass public contracting regulations by allowing for private negotiations that completely leave the public out of the process does not seem to be a prudent approach for the Legislature to take. Finally, any effort of the Oregon Business Development Department to work with the OSU Extension Service to design a program for the further expansion of juniper harvests should include representation from the Oregon Department of Forestry and conservation staff from the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife to assure that all of the environmental issues associated with any large expansion of juniper harvest are adequately considered as well as compliance with the Forest Practices Act.

In closing, the Native Fish Society believes that if HB 2997 and HB 2998 are passed and funded, there doesn't seem to be any need for further consideration of HB 2808.

We appreciate this opportunity to comment on this important matter.

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