



May 28, 2020

Chairman Witt and members of the committee,

Thank you for the invitation to join you today. My name is Jennifer Fairbrother, and I am the Conservation Director at the Native Fish Society. The Native Fish Society is a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit with a mission to restore abundant wild fish, free-flowing rivers, and thriving local communities across Oregon and the Pacific Northwest.

The COVID-19 pandemic and associated social and economic challenges have highlighted the importance of healthy, local rivers. For many Oregonians used to jumping in the car to head to iconic river destinations in Oregon and beyond, backyard streams and nearby rivers and their wild fish have offered places of solace and comfort through this trying period. For others, local waters have become places of discovery where they can watch the natural world unfold as they remain at home and do their part to social distance.

For all that our native, wild fish have to offer us as individuals and communities in this difficult time, they continue to face enormous challenges that threaten their very survival as species. In Oregon, there are 14 salmon and steelhead populations listed as either threatened or endangered. This year is forecasted to be another dismal year for salmon returns to the Columbia Basin, once one of the world's great wild fish producing powerhouses.

After more than a century of industrialized management of these populations, fisheries managers, scientists, and advocates have come to understand the critical importance of restoring wild populations. For what we have discovered is the unbelievable resilience of wild fish; that if we respect the basic needs of these species—provide them with access to healthy habitats, clean, cool water, and the opportunity to live out their life histories—our wild, native fish will be able to flourish and in turn support the many values that we as individuals and communities gain from them and our rivers.

But we won't succeed without a concerted effort by the State of Oregon. During this time of fiscal contraction, it is critical that the state take a hard look at where tax dollars can have the greatest impact for our community health and our natural treasures. It's time to evaluate the ecological and social impacts of the state's hatchery system and identify where such funds can be better utilized to restore wild fish, rivers, and communities.

Wild, native fish are a keystone species; they're uniquely entwined in a natural relationship with people and wildlife. Their wellbeing and success affect us all. Let's ensure that we nurture our rivers and wild fish so they in turn can continue to nurture us.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Fairbrother
Conservation Director