



Memorandum

To: Members of the Natural Resources Sub-Committee
Fr: David Moskowitz, The Conservation Angler
Jim Myron, Governmental Affairs
Dt: March 11, 2019
Re: Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife Budget Discussion on SB 5510

The purpose of this memo is to respond to some of the discussion regarding Willamette River fish hatcheries during today's subcommittee hearing on the ODFW Budget Presentation.

This memo will present information on three topics:

1. Non-native summer steelhead stocked in the Santiam and Willamette
2. Operations at the Leaburg Hatchery on the McKenzie River
3. Hatchery Operations Generally

1. Non-native summer steelhead stocked in the Santiam and Willamette

Background on Fish Presence

The native, wild fish of the Upper Willamette River were spring chinook and winter steelhead. There are native cutthroat and wild rainbow trout throughout the upper Willamette as well.

Summer steelhead were never native anywhere in the Willamette Basin. They only exist as native on the Klamath, Rogue, Umpqua and Siletz on the coast, lower Columbia Rivers in SW Washington and are not found in the Oregon portion of the Columbia Basin until the Hood River and then are found in Fifteen Mile Creek, Deschutes, John Day and Umatilla Rivers.

How We Lost Nature's Bounty

The Willamette basin Project – 14 dams meant to control flooding – blocked the most important habitat for spring chinook and winter steelhead on the Santiam, McKenzie and Upper Willamette. As mitigation for the lost habitat and fish, the COE and ODFW have been producing hatchery salmon and steelhead and rainbow trout.

Why Summer Steelhead Hatchery Production is Ending

The Willamette Basin hatchery summer steelhead program in the Santiam watershed is ending because the US Army Corps of Engineers (COE) which is responsible for mitigating for lost fish habitat and fisheries, made a scientifically sound decision to end the program because of the ecological harm these non-native, out-of-basin hatchery summer steelhead have on ESA-listed wild winter steelhead.

NOAA Fisheries has sent letters to Washington and Oregon asking them to stop releasing the "Skamania stock" hatchery summer steelhead in Puget Sound and in the Upper Willamette River Basin (above Willamette Falls) because of the negative impact this domesticated hatchery stock has on both wild winter and summer steelhead.

What Will Continue

The Santiam spring chinook programs will continue there, as well as in the Willamette and McKenzie Rivers. The COE will continue to develop fish passage above the big mainstem dams so that wild spring chinook and winter steelhead have a chance to make it into historic habitat that lies beyond the big, slack-water reservoirs such as Detroit, Foster, Cougar, Dexter, and elsewhere in the upper Willamette and McKenzie.

Who Pays for Hatchery Fish in the Santiam and McKenzie?

Oregon anglers do not pay for the hatchery produced fish on the Santiam Rivers – the hatchery spring chinook, non-native hatchery summer steelhead and hatchery trout are paid for by federal mitigation funds – meaning that all American taxpayers are subsidizing fishing in the Willamette Basin. Because the Santiam hatcheries will remain open to raise spring chinook, it is uncertain that there will be direct job losses – something that should be carefully reviewed.

2. Operations at the Leaburg Hatchery on the McKenzie River

Mitigation, while not perfectly compensating what Oregon lost, is being met.

The purpose of the Leaburg hatchery was to provide trout for release into the Willamette River system as mitigation for the loss of trout and trout habitat created by the construction of Willamette basin dams by the COE. Director Melcher noted that the COE is currently meeting its mitigation obligations regarding trout produced at Leaburg with a private entity to provide these mitigation fish. Therefore, it is not necessary to continue operating the facility. There is another state hatchery on the McKenzie near Leaburg which should be evaluated regarding its ability to fulfill the need for hatchery spring chinook salmon already being produced in the McKenzie River.

Oregon must conduct its Due Diligence

The Legislature is being asked to commit funding for a facility that it does not own. Before Oregon accepts responsibility for this aging federal facility, a full appraisal of the facility and an analysis of operational plan should be conducted. ODFW is already hopelessly behind on addressing its deferred hatchery maintenance across the state.

Please ask for an honest assessment of what would it cost to purchase or lease the facility and rebuild it to make it operational. It would be prudent to contract with a disinterested third party to provide a cost/benefit analysis of Leaburg before the state commits to its acquisition.

3. Hatcheries are not the Solution

The vast weight of scientific review has detailed the multiple problems with reliance on hatchery production to replace or restore wild salmon and steelhead.

Often, when hatchery production ends, wild fish populations typically increase. The clearest case to consider is what has happened to Oregon coastal Coho salmon when hatcheries were closed, harvest is carefully managed, and habitat restored or protected.

The recent events show that recreational angling is frequently closed because hatchery production fails to return even enough adult hatchery fish to meet the hatchery's own broodstock goals. Most hatchery releases have return rates with less weight in returning fish than in weight that was released.

Hatcheries are a failure because not only do they not restore wild populations but they mask the decline of wild fish, they attract predators due to the strategy of mass-release, the juveniles compete with wild fish for rearing space and food during growth and out-migration, they dilute the productivity of wild fish when they spawn in the wild, and they represent a lost-opportunity cost because scarce fish dollars are not spent on monitoring wild fish nor fixing habitat factors.

Hatcheries, though they did not start out with ill-intent, have come to represent a subsidy to the sport and commercial industries without an accurate or effective accounting of their ecologic, economic and social costs or benefits. They certainly do not work to conserve wild fish.