

Dear Senator Gelser,

The 2013 Senate Bill 830 was intended to move the commercial gill net fishing fleet out of the Columbia River mainstem into designated hatchery-planted "SAFE" areas that are located out of the main channel. The intent was two-fold: 1) to reduce impact on the main Columbia River fishery from interruption upstream when gill nets are used, and reduce bi-catch of protected or endangered species; and 2) to maintain viability of the commercial gill net fleet by reducing bi-catch with improved nets and/or practices. By planting hatchery fish in these lower river locations, it was thought that this method will reduce interactions between native and hatchery fish while providing a greater number of fish to the overall fishery near the mouth of the Columbia River. The Columbia River Basin Enhancement (CRBE) Fee (\$9.75 charge for fishing in the Columbia River and its tributaries) was to be used to transition the commercial fleet out of the main channel into hatchery planted "SAFE" areas near Astoria and/or provide changes to the fleet's fishing methods that would allow better selective fishing methods.

This funding was collected since implementation in 2013 and had accumulated to >\$6.0M through 2018, but as yet has not been utilized for the intended purpose of protecting the fishery by implementing the "SAFE" fishing areas for the commercial gill net fleet. These funds are apparently now being considered a new revenue source (collected nearly exclusively from the sports anglers) and recently a portion of these funds has been diverted to support removal of repeat predator sea-lions at fish run choke points (Bonneville Dam and Willamette Falls). Now the Governor wants to divert these funds to other uses and collect this tax continuously. This is a true bait-and-switch action. Sports anglers and conservation groups have requested that more transparency be provided on the expenditure of these funds and that the original action for which they were collected be implemented (move the commercial gill-net fleet to these designated SAFE areas).

The allotment of fish in the Columbia River system has been an equal portion of ~2% of the ODFW estimated run for the commercial gill net fleet and ~2% of the ODFW estimated run for sports anglers. The catch is measured in two different ways, the commercial gill net fleet data is from dock delivery from the fish buyer with no independent oversight; the sports anglers are reported by static analysis of actual dock landing location inspections by ODFW personnel.

In 2018, per ODFW Fall data, the commercial gill net fleet delivered 14,924 Chinook Salmon (total weight of 203,021 lbs), 12,491 Coho Salmon (total weight of 92,079 lbs), and 530 White Sturgeon (total weight of 17,515 lbs) to the buyers using 34 boats. In the same period in 2018, the sports anglers caught 3,978 Chinook Salmon of which 1,400 natives were released (35% of the catch), for a total keep of 2,578 fish, at which point the season was closed. The sports anglers also caught 3,004 Coho Salmon of which 1,403 natives were released (47% of the catch), for a total keep of 1,601 fish. This was with 4,788 boats and 15,412 sports anglers. Note that the commercial gill net fleet does not return any bi-catch or native fish.

Allowed ESA impacts to upriver spring Chinook are allocated at 80% to recreational fisheries and 20% to commercial fisheries.

We are supportive of SB 0547 to remove gill nets and tangle nets completely and due to our recent experience with CBRE fee actions that were to help transition the commercial gill net fleet to better fishery management practices. We are less so supportive of SB 0619 with its transition feature that failed as derived from the original SB 830. It is time for the state to move on from gill-nets in the river; no one should be guaranteed a profit from past practices. Non-transparency of the commercial fleet in providing data on their catch is also not fair to the fishery.

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Why remove the commercial gill nets from the Columbia River?

Economically, the ~150 member commercial gill net fleet catch has ranged from in value from \$3.6-\$5M annually (about 3% of the \$150M Oregon ocean commercial fishing total and less in 2018). (Note above that only about 34 boats participated in 2018.) Compare this to the sports-angler impact of 530,000 ODFW-licensed persons annually with their boats, fuel, supporting hotels, restaurants, bait, fuel, fishing gear, and guides which represents multiple \$10s of millions of state revenue and ~150,000 sports anglers that purchased the CBRE.

Sports anglers are required to release native fish without removing them from the water by removing tension on the barbless hook or cutting the leader. The commercial gill net fleet is only required to be selective on Spring salmon runs (according to ODFW Staff statement to the Commission 3/17/2017) and thus must revive and release native fish. Summer and Fall salmon runs are not required to be selective on bi-catch nor are they monitored at all per ODFW staff statement 3/17/2017. ODFW Staff said that the commercial gill net fleet is arbitrarily assigned a value of 30% of the annual allowable impact on native and protected species runs (with no actual monitored sampling). Since 2016, ODFW Fish and Game Commission has allowed a roughly 50 active commercial gill net boats with a take valued at \$3-5M/y) and a good lobby group to control the Columbia River Basin tributaries fishery without regard to the 140,000 licensed sports anglers (\$27M just in license fees and not including guides, boats, hotels, food, fishing equipment, bait, fuel, etc.) that use the same waters and fishery runs. By the same ODFW Staff assessment, sport-anglers are allotted a 12% impact on Spring and up to 15% impact on summer and fall fisherys although they are dock checked and ticketed for any bi-catch. This constraint on the Commercial gill net fleet has not been imposed or monitored.

(2016 ODFW sports-angler data: \$25.6M annual resident and non-resident fishing licenses plus an annual \$1.3M for Columbia River Basin Endorsement fees collected vs \$18,796 for gill net licenses both resident and non-resident). In addition, the sports anglers are required to purchase a fishing tag costing ~\$2 per fish (plus an optional hatchery tag at \$1 per fish to record all fish caught. The commercial gill net fleet do not pay a per fish fee.

The commercial gill nets are non-selective and according to ODFW data reported before 2013 gill nets took 1100-1400 sturgeon each year with no regard to size regulations. They stopped reporting this in 2013 as they were no longer supposed to take these fish (although there was no change in gear or fishing technique). Sportsanglers have not allowed to keep Sturgeon since 2013. Who supports the hatchery fish being planted in the non-main stream Columbia River locations for the commercial gill net fleet? The license fees of which the commercial fleet are contributing about 1.5% total provide them with 50% of the annual take of fish.

Statements that sports anglers do not remove sufficient hatchery fish from native spawning grounds are likely true because very low daily limits are allowed to ensure more selective removal of hatchery stock. Hatchery tags are available that allow additional hatchery fish removal but only one or two fish per trip thus requiring many trips to accomplish the task as opposed to the "efficient" gill netting of many fish in an unselective manner and no limit on how many bi-catch native fish happen to be taken. Gill netting does nothing for adding spawn ground nutrients up-river if catch and bi-catch is dumped at Astoria whereas the sportsanglers distribute carcasses up-stream. There is likely also a correlation with the pinniped problem in Astoria all the way up to Willamette Falls and Bonneville Dam that has not been addressed.