

Willamette RIVERKEEPER®

Testimony to the Oregon State Legislature - Joint Committee on Ways and Means - Subcommittee on Natural Resources

Re: ODFW Budget - Funding of summer steelhead hatcheries in the Willamette System

Co-Chairs Taylor and Reardon, and Committee Members:

On behalf of Willamette Riverkeeper and our members throughout Oregon, I write to urge you not to approve funding from the State of Oregon's Department of Fish and Wildlife for hatcheries that produce summer steelhead in the Willamette River System.

While funding for hatcheries that produce summer steelhead in the Willamette System is not currently in the ODFW budget proposal, it is our understanding that some in the hatchery fishing community are working to make this happen on the Santiam River. Such an addition would be a mistake, and would work at cross purposes with restoring native wild winter steelhead currently listed as *threatened* under the Federal Endangered Species Act.

It has been determined by the US Army Corps, who had funded these hatcheries in prior years, that funding the artificial reproduction of summer steelhead (*a fish that was never seen in the Willamette River System before the late 1960s due to hatcheries*) may well have a detrimental impact on native Winter Steelhead. As a result, they are ending funding for this program. While hatchery summer steelhead are not officially *invasive*, mounting scientific evidence points to the reality that they may have a similar impact to native winter steelhead and efforts by many to restore these threatened fish.

It is important to understand that the summer steelhead hatchery was a late add-on in the 1960s to mitigate for the impact of the dams on native fish in the Willamette River Basin. Since that time, the Endangered Species Act was passed to protect and restore native species - resulting in significant efforts to restore wild winter steelhead, a fish native to the Willamette River. Over the past couple of decades fish biologists have studied the issue and believe that hatchery summer steelhead may well be having an impact on the ability of native winter steelhead to reproduce and thrive.

The science on this issue is solid enough to end the artificial reproduction of, and planting of summer steelhead in the Santiam River System, as recognized by the US Army Corps of Engineers.

A great many organizations and government entities are working hard to restore the ecological integrity of the Willamette River System, in part, to restore wild fish. Artificially producing summer steelhead runs at cross purposes with that effort. Tens of millions of dollars have been spent over the past few years to restore habitat, and improve fish passage at the US Army Corps dams, and it makes little sense to spend ODFW dollars on a practice that is problematic for native fish.

While there are those who are impassioned about fishing for hatchery fish, in this instance it simply does not make much sense to continue the practice in the Willamette River System with summer steelhead. Further, the 2008 Biological Opinion for the Willamette indicated significant concern about hatchery summer steelhead program, and studies since that time have validated that concern.

We highly recommend that any proposals to spend State of Oregon dollars, from any source, on producing hatchery summer steelhead in the Willamette River System, be denied.

Thank you all for this opportunity to provide our views on ODFW's budget proposal. We appreciate your service to the State of Oregon, and your thoughtfulness regarding this and other issues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Travis Williams", written in a cursive style.

Travis Williams
Riverkeeper & Executive Director