



CCA

COASTAL CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION
OREGON

Testimony before House Committee on Natural Resources

3-18-19

Chair Witt,

Members of the Committee. I am Bruce Polley and I live in Sherwood, Oregon. I am a volunteer with the Coastal Conservation Association of Oregon (CCA) and am here on behalf of our members to support House Bill 3016 to fund hatchery plants of Summer Steelhead in the North Santiam River.

The Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE) has paid for "mitigation" due to habitat loss caused by the building of flood control dams in the Willamette Valley. This mitigation for the past 70 years has come predominantly in the form of hatchery fish. These mitigation fish have created some pretty amazing fisheries in the Willamette Valley and its numerous tributaries and benefit communities all the way down to Astoria as these fish migrate back.

Summer Steelhead are a fish that many sport anglers started out their fishing life with. They are available during the beautiful warm summer months where you can row a drift boat down a beautiful cool stream on a warm day and catch an acrobatic steelhead that has inspired sport fishers for generations. These hatchery origin Summer Steelhead are also fine table fair that any angler would be proud to bring home to their family.

Over the past decades we have experienced cut after cut of hatchery programs that have created so many avid salmon and steelhead anglers in Oregon. Recently extreme anti hatchery groups have sued to stop these programs, often when simple technicalities due to slow moving federal agencies allowed them to halt these important programs.

Last year the ACOE was sued to stop the Summer Steelhead program on the North Santiam. And rather than fight the suit the ACOE elected to summarily drop this Summer Steelhead program. The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) has been working closely with federal managers to maintain these programs and reduce interactions between hatchery Summer Steelhead and Wild Winter Steelhead in these waters.

Recently we have seen more and more peer reviewed scientific data showing that the old dogma of hatchery steelhead being a major negative impact on Wild Winter Steelhead is not true. The Courter study on the upper Clackamas River is the most recent but not only study sending this message that we can have wild fish protections and still have hatchery enhanced runs of fish that provide robust fisheries and catch and keep opportunities.

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As you may have heard, CCA worked for 10 years to address the critical problem of sea lion predation of fish at the falls in Oregon City. Partnering with the Columbia River Treaty Tribes, ODFW, WDFW and other fish advocacy groups we were able to pass common sense sea lion controls at the falls in Oregon City which is happening now, and expanded authority that will affect the mainstem Columbia above the 205 bridge and all lower Columbia Tributaries. We are hopeful that new authority will be activated and working by this time next year.

Just last week I heard a report from ODFW that with their current authority at Willamette Falls the last California Sea lion in that area was removed, and the following day 200 Winter Steelhead crossed the fish ladders at the falls! The fish that were so imperiled by this un-natural level of predation are now getting the relief they so desperately needed.

It is noteworthy that the same groups who sue to stop these hatchery programs were silent on steelhead needing relief from sea lion predation.

ODFW has been working with federal managers to reduce interactions between summer steelhead and winter steelhead. They are confident the new practices they are implementing will reduce those interactions and provide protections for wild fish. Because of this confidence ODFW is willing to continue these programs that the ACOE is dropping.

That brings us to this bill which will fund ODFW continuing this program and continuing a vital fishery that is so important to the rural residents of the Santiam Canyon. It is a relatively small investment for something so important to these communities and residents and to the heritage of Oregon.

Bruce Polley
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