

4-24-19

Dear Representative Helm:

Thank you for organizing “Wild Salmon Day” at the legislature and promoting HCR 35 in support of International Year of the Salmon.

It is important to give Oregon’s living resource of wild salmon and steelhead recognition and to celebrate their contribution to ecological health of this state and to the economy. Therefore “Wild Salmon Day” and International Year of the Salmon are important for public awareness. The question that haunts me over the 50 years I have been involved in promoting wild salmon and steelhead conservation is: Will it be enough?

At my request the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife Commission adopted the Oregon Wild Fish Policy in 1978. I assumed that because this important Commission decision, codified in administrative rule, that the agency would implement this first in the nation policy. Internal review by ODFW staff, however, found that while some biologists took it seriously the administrative leadership was opposed. Since then this policy has been revised into what is now the Native Fish Conservation Policy, but wild salmon and steelhead conservation continues to be treated as an elective.

Wild salmon and steelhead are place-based natural resources, adapting constantly to their home stream environments, yet state management fails to manage fisheries and habitat protection on that basis. State land and water management agencies have failed to protect the spawning and rearing habitats needed by wild salmon to persist and fishery managers continue to manage fisheries that prevents spawner escapement by population and river for conservation. The unit of conservation for wild salmon and steelhead is the population and their habitat.

Since Oregon made a commitment to apply conservation management of wild salmon and steelhead in 1978, these animals have been listed as threatened with extinction under the U.S. Endangered Species Act. The states of Oregon, Washington, Idaho and California manage salmon under permit from the National Marine Fisheries Service for replacement with hatchery fish and unregulated harvest so that wild salmon and steelhead protection and recovery as required by federal law cannot be ensured.

It is unreasonable to expect wild salmon and steelhead will survive climate change due to fish, land and water management agencies continuing to fail to apply the best available scientific evidence necessary for their protection and recovery.

Wild Salmon Day and the International Year of the Salmon could result in a commitment, recognized in the 1930s, to secure wild salmon and steelhead escapement and the protection of their home stream environment as the purpose of management.

Sincerely,

Bill Bakke