

The Oregon Salmon Credit

"If the salmon and steelhead are running, then as far as I am concerned, God knows that all is well in His world...the health of the environment is good if the salmon and steelhead are around. It is that simple" - Governor Tom McCall

With the Salmon Credit, we have an incredible chance to turn a shining new page in Oregon's spectacular conservation history. A page that will soon become a novel filled with grassroots, everyday heroes; the sparkling and resilient people of Oregon. Given the opportunity, they will roll up their sleeves to save what they hold most dear.

We can no longer say we're doing enough as we watch our cherished salmon runs slip away. As a state we must make a bold statement on behalf of this magnificent species and follow it through with immediate action, so salmon do not perish under our watch. This crisis has presented Oregon with its greatest opportunity. An opportunity to join with citizens and landowners across the state to save these fish. The Salmon Credit will be the most progressive environmental legislation introduced in Oregon since Tom McCall's land use goals and his Bottle Bill of the 1970's, and how wonderful to invoke his enduring conservation legacy in this bill for the sake of the Oregon salmon he held most dear.

This is an idea wrapped around turning only the unproductive edges of our farm, ranch and ag land (land that never wanted to be anything other than salmon or marsh habitat) into revenue producing wild salmon habitat...on a strictly volunteer basis. There has never been a consistent or attractive way to monetize rearing wild fish for landowners, so they can truly say, "I grow cattle, hay and salmon" or "I grow timber and salmon." The Salmon Credit will allow landowners to make salmon a permanent part of their land's revenue stream, as the credit will be attached to the land in perpetuity and always provide a constant cash yield. When crops are poor, cattle markets are down, or timber markets low, a landowners Salmon Credit income will be steady and reliable. This level of reliable annual income will truly help to support and save our family farms and ranches. There are many federal and state programs that deal with conservation banking, conservation easements, and outright purchase of private land for conservation purposes. This is not any of those, as they are cumbersome, paperwork heavy, restrictive, and typically developed solely by the government.

The program is entirely voluntary, and grass-roots driven, created by and designed for the people of Oregon (and not some far-off federal agency). The premise is simple and easy to understand. When a business or private entity is required to provide salmonid mitigation for new construction, or a development project, the process is cumbersome and time consuming...often requiring biologists, geomorphologists, engineers, landowner negotiations, multiple agency permitting and much more. It can easily take years. If a project could be given surety (approval) of at least fulfilling a project's mitigation requirement (saving literally years), project managers would absolutely be willing to pay more. Based on the size and impact of a development project, the state would pre-determine how many Salmon Credits a developer needed to satisfy a project's mitigation obligation and they would simply purchase the number of Salmon Credits needed to satisfy that obligation.

With the Salmon Credit, marginal or poor production lands in Oregon (that would however make excellent salmonid habitat) will be prequalified for restoration enrollment on a voluntary basis. Predetermined ESU's (evolutionary significant units) already show where this potential land is located. If (for conversation purposes) we say it costs \$50,000 an acre to restore an acre of marsh or off channel habitat, then a salmon credit would cost \$100,000. Of that total (\$100,000), \$50,000 would be used to restore the acre and \$50,000 would be invested in State of Oregon Bonds. The yield of those bonds would then be permanently tied to that acre (no matter who owned it), providing a permanent, reliable revenue source that paid the landowner to rear salmon. The only requirement of the landowner would be to simply maintain that portion of the property as salmon habitat. The bond funds would have no restriction of use, and could be used to maintain infrastructure, pay taxes or mortgage, buy stock or seed, build a barn, or simply buy a tractor.

Likewise, there are large companies and corporations that can't fully mitigate aquatic resource impacts under the Clean Water Act. In these cases, they are required to provide compensatory mitigation or pay fines, which could instead be satisfied with the purchase of Salmon Credits. Additionally, large corporations with a strong green ethic could purchase salmon credits to support Oregon's wild fisheries, family farms, ranches, and small plot timber growers. It is envisioned this program would be administered by the Oregon Department of Agriculture, and restoration of enrolled Salmon Credit lands be conducted by our tribes and local/regional watershed groups. The Salmon Credit could also be designed to offer investment incentives like tax credits for investors who don't have a mitigation obligation.

In conclusion:

- 1. The Salmon Credit successfully and permanently monetizes the rearing of wild salmon for landowners, providing a dynamic new incentive for critical statewide salmon restoration and conservation on a strictly voluntary basis.**
- 2. The Salmon Credit is not designed by a federal or state agency. It is not a cumbersome or difficult plan. It is a grassroots effort designed by the people of Oregon who deeply understand what is needed to make this program a tremendous success, on-the-ground, in the real world.**
- 3. The Salmon Credit is paid for by private money, and not Oregon taxpayer funds. It is further envisioned funds from outside the state will also purchase Salmon Credits.**
- 4. The Salmon Credit will directly support the long-term fiscal health and continued survival of Oregon family farms, ranches, and small plot timber growers, ensuring the future of Oregon's magnificent landscape for generations to come.**
- 5. The Salmon Credit will be a powerful carbon sequestration tool, as salmon habitat (especially marshland) has some of the highest values in the world for carbon sequestration.**

The Salmon Credit represents the decisive, positive action desperately needed to change the face of efforts to save salmon across the state. It will pull Oregon's citizens together across political lines in a dynamic and wonderful way, as they work for the transcendent cause of saving these spectacular fish who directly speak to the soul of every Oregonian.

