



April 23, 2021

House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee  
Oregon House of Representatives

Chair Hudson and Committee Members:

We are writing to urge you to support Senate Bill 59 - as adopted by the Senate -- which would reauthorize the Columbia River Basin Endorsement (Endorsement) and provides added accountability, direction, and transparency consistent with the original purpose of the Endorsement and in response to continued efforts to undermine the Oregon-Washington Columbia River fishery reforms.

The Endorsement was authorized in 2013 through Senate Bill 830 to help fund the Columbia River fishery reforms, which sought to transition non-tribal commercial gillnets from the mainstem Columbia River to enhanced off-channel fishing areas and prioritize selective recreational fisheries in the mainstem. The \$9.75 annual Endorsement is required to fish for salmon, steelhead and sturgeon throughout the Columbia/Willamette River basin and has generated \$9.6 million since 2014 to help fund increased hatchery production in off-channel areas, fish conservation, and enhancement activities for recreational fisheries.

The intent of SB 830 was to improve the conservation of Columbia River fisheries through more selective fishing methods, optimize the overall economic benefits of these fisheries, and resolve decades of controversy by transitioning non-tribal gillnets from the mainstem lower Columbia River. These goals remain critical today as our region seeks to recover Columbia River Basin salmon and steelhead populations, including the 13 stocks listed under the Endangered Species Act.

In 2013, the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission adopted rules consistent with SB 830. Those rules included a plan to completely remove traditional non-tribal gillnets from the mainstem by 2017. In March 2017, the Commission adopted revised rules that further increased off-channel hatchery production and modified the gillnet restrictions, including allowing limited, continued mainstem gillnetting during the Fall. These changes were extremely unpopular among recreational anglers who purchase the Endorsement but were described by ODFW staff as a careful balance between meeting the adaptive management requirements of SB 830 and maintaining support for the Endorsement.

The 2017 rules provide an important backstop for the Columbia River fishery reforms as additional progress is made to implement selective commercial fishing gears and a gillnet license buyback, other key provision from the original reform plan. Unfortunately, the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission recently adopted a [controversial policy](#) to abandon the fishery reforms and drastically increase mainstem gillnetting. Washington is now pressing Oregon to revise its rules to allow for expanded mainstem gillnetting. We appreciate the efforts of the Oregon Commission to stand by its current rules and refocus the discussion on achieving broader recovery goals for wild Columbia River basin salmon populations. However, we believe the Oregon Legislature must set clear expectations related to the reauthorization of the Endorsement and its connection to the reforms.

Senate Bill 59, as passed by the Senate, sets a clear standard for maintaining the Endorsement, which would automatically sunset if the ODFW Commission follows Washington's lead in abandoning the gillnet transition. It does not limit the Commission's authority to revise the rules or prevent the agency from building on other aspects of the reforms, including further increases in off-channel hatchery production, modifications to the number or size of off-channel fishing areas, and the development of alternative fishing gears. The legislation reauthorizes the Endorsement for four years, rather than the permanent reauthorization originally sought by ODFW, and includes amendments to provide greater transparency and added focus on funding activities directly related to the Columbia River reforms - including a focus on selective fishing practices.

The amended legislation was crafted following discussions with Chairman Golden and ODFW staff and received a nearly unanimous vote by the Senate Natural Resources and Wildfire Recovery Committee and the bipartisan support of the full Senate. We ask that you also support this thoughtful compromise. We also hope you will encourage ODFW to work with stakeholders to develop a buyback proposal for Columbia River gillnet licenses for potential consideration by the 2022 legislature. This is a critical next step towards providing a long-term solution to this controversial issue.

Sincerely,

Coastal Conservation Association Oregon  
Trout Unlimited  
Northwest Sportfishing Industry Association  
Association of Northwest Steelheaders  
The Conservation Angler  
Northwest Guides & Anglers Association