



Association of Northwest Steelheaders

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March 9th, 2017

Established 1960

Dear Governor Brown:

Accompanying this letter, the Association of NW Steelheaders presents a petition signed by 5,891 citizens requesting you to:

- (1) Direct the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission to commit to full implementation of the Columbia River salmon fisheries reform plan and to enact regulations consistent with the policies recently adopted by the state of Washington; and
- (2) Remove Commissioner Mr. Bruce Buckmaster and replace him with a neutral member in order to rebalance the Commission.

We were pleased that shortly after we commenced our petition drive, you issued a letter on February 7, admonishing the Commission that its January 20 decision to abandon the bi-state reform plan was “unacceptable.” Your letter requested the Commission to “honor th[e] commitments” made in the bi-state reform plan, adhere to the intent of Senate Bill 830 (which affirmed the reform plan), and adopt rules that are concurrent with those adopted by the state of Washington. You further directed the Commission to align its rules with your policy by April 3, 2017.

The Steelheaders applaud you for listening to the sport fishing community – the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife’s (ODFW) largest stakeholder group – and for recognizing that the measures adopted by the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission (WFWC) satisfy these elements and align with the policy of your administration.

We remain concerned, however, because your letter also suggests that ODFW’s staff recommendation satisfies your policy goals. ODFW’s staff recommendation, in stark contrast to both the bi-state reform plan and the WFWC’s policy, allows non-selective gill nets – which indiscriminately kill both hatchery and threatened and endangered wild salmon and other species – to permanently remain on the mainstem Columbia. It also fails to deliver the full sport fishing priority promised in the reform plan, which will result in the annual loss of thousands of recreational angling trips. In this manner, ODFW’s recommendation fails to “honor the commitments” made in the reform plan. We note also that the proposal contained in the March 7 letter from Commission Chair Finley to the WFWC similarly fails to uphold these commitments.

As you know, sport anglers have held up our end of the reform plan. When requested by former-Governor Kitzhaber, we stood down on Ballot Measure 81, which sought to ban

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gill nets statewide; we agreed to the transfer of hatchery smolts from the Willamette and Sandy River systems to off-channel areas where commercial fishing is prioritized; and we paid our endorsement fee to transition non-tribal gillnets off the mainstem Columbia. In turn, we were promised the use of selective commercial fishing methods that save wild salmon and steelhead and enhance conservation by better targeting hatchery fish, and the prioritization of sport fishing opportunity and economics. We appreciate that you recognize these commitments need to be honored.

Following your direction, the Commission is slated to revisit its “unacceptable” decision at its March 17 meeting in Corvallis. We urge you to remain engaged on this issue to ensure the Commission takes prompt action in line with your administration’s policy, and that you clarify to the Commission that it should enact rules consistent with the policy of the WFWC in order to “honor the commitments” of the bi-state reform plan agreement.

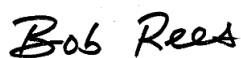
We also request that you re-balance the membership of the Commission. In our view, the Commission’s ill-conceived decision to abandon the reform plan, and the associated feeling of betrayal in the sport fishing community, can be directly traced to the appointment of Mr. Bruce Buckmaster. As you know, Mr. Buckmaster is a former lobbyist and strategist for the commercial gill net fleet who vehemently opposed – and continues to oppose – implementation of the reform plan. When his appointment was announced, despite assurance to the contrary, sport fishing industry and community leaders expressed grave concerns about his intentions to undo the reform plan and these concerns proved to be right on the mark. He is a divisive figure and his presence on the Commission continues to undermine the Commission’s legitimacy in the eyes of recreational anglers.

Moreover, Mr. Buckmaster’s appointment resulted in Commission membership being weighted too heavily in favor of commercial fishing interests. As you know, in addition to Mr. Buckmaster, Commissioner Laura Anderson also has close ties to, and is a staunch advocate for, the commercial fishing industry. While we respect the importance of commercial fishing to Oregon, and recognize that the industry rightfully needs an effective voice on the Commission, having two such members has resulted in an imbalanced and partisan Commission that has lost the confidence of recreational anglers. This is especially problematic in the face of planned sport fishing fee hikes in 2018 and 2020, as well as needed support for the task force recommendation for alternative funding for the agency.

In this regard, we commend your recent appointment of Mr. Jim Bittle to the Commission. Mr. Bittle has long been involved in the sport fishing industry and we are optimistic he can be an effective voice for recreational anglers throughout Oregon. Notwithstanding Mr. Bittle’s appointment, however, the Commission is still misbalanced and we urge you to replace Mr. Buckmaster with a neutral Commissioner – someone who can represent the interests of all Oregonians and help restore confidence in the Commission.

Once again, we thank you for your letter directing the Commission to correct its path and to uphold the commitments made in the Columbia River fisheries reform plan. We request that you clarify your letter to the Commission and direct it to adopt regulations consistent with the policy adopted by the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission. As you know, this is an issue of immense importance to the recreational fishing community and sport fishing industry, and we would appreciate your continued support.

Best Regards,



Bob Rees
Executive Director
Association of NW Steelheaders