SALMON FOR ALL

May 19, 2021.

Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission; Director Kelly Susewind,

Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission; Director Curt Melcher

Salmon For All is a 501 (c) (6) organization of Washington and Oregon Columbia River commercial fishers, buyers, processors and associates. We have reviewed the agenda for your upcoming May 26 bi-state meeting, and would like to take this opportunity to introduce ourselves and explain our role in recovery, conservation and the economic role of our harvest.

Among the many things you do as commissioners, you deal with people's food. We are the harvesters of that food and provide salmon, sturgeon and smelt for purchase by consumers. Our fishing operations are a seasonal round, including eulachon or smelt, spring and summer chinook, coho and fall chinook, with sturgeon as an incidental catch in salmon fisheries. Most of us also own other permits, often in Alaska, such as the Bristol Bay gillnet fishery, or we may have permits for winter fisheries such as crab. Some may fish herring in Alaska, or own halibut quota. Much of the seasonal round is hidden from sight, as it comprises activities such as purchasing web, putting nets together, and repair and maintenance of boats and docks. A lot of planning occurs regarding the best use of the permits each fisher owns. Decisions about where and when to fish are based on run forecasts, price projections and other information, some of which comes from federal sources and ODFW and WDFW. Fishing operations are frequently family-oriented, with crew members being drawn from family members.

Our concern about the May meeting agenda is that it does not address the necessity of working out concurrence between Oregon and Washington for the Columbia River gillnet fisheries, particularly in the fall. We should have been planning our individual strategies months ago. As it is, people have already invested in tangle net gear, at a cost of approximately $3000 per net, without knowing if there will be a fall tangle net fishery for coho in October. We don't know if or when or what kind of gear will be usable for spring or summer chinook fisheries next year. These decisions in turn affect buyers and processors who hire help to process the catch, and at this point do not know what will happen in either state in a couple of months. As commissioners you bear a high degree of responsibility in the smooth running of the two states' commercial fisheries, and we encourage you to expedite these decisions. We have all been hit hard by Covid this past year, which increased uncertainty and led to higher fishing and processing costs. We would appreciate a swift conclusion to the concurrence issue which you are required by law to undertake.

We appreciate your dedication regarding conservation issues. We have attached a document regarding the background legislation that governs our fishery, and how conservation is a basic part of that

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legislation. It also described how the gillnet fishery has adapted its gear over time to fit conservation standards. We do not view conservation and our fishery as mutually exclusive. Rather, we take the longer term view, in that fish abundance that has sustained our families for generations must be supported, and we have done our part.

We do want to bring up our participation in alternative gear studies for the last 20 years. We believe that at this point, after numerous gears have been tested in various locations, it is time for the agencies to review these efforts, analyze what has succeeded, what has failed, what the actual goals are for developing alternative gear, and whether those goals need revision. A lot of money has been spent on these gears; it is time for a thorough examination of what has been accomplished. Oregon already has a draft of such a study. Washington has not yet done this work. We recommend a review of the studies that have been done, to include costs, fisher contribution in terms of labor and money, catches, economic and fishing community impacts, and that conservation benefits, such as pHOS reduction, be studied, at a minimum.

We appreciate your efforts on behalf of fish and wildlife in both states. However, our role as salmon harvesters for the public needs immediate attention if it is to operate for the public benefit and the benefit of the families and communities who rely on it. We request that you expedite the needed bi-state concurrence. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Jim Wells

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