

Gubernatorial Candidates Weigh in on Marine Conservation and Harvest Reform

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By now you are well aware of the explosive growth in membership that Coastal Conservation Association has experienced since its expansion to the Northwest 18 months ago. Our 8,000 members share a common concern about the conservation of our marine resources and are frustrated this priority isn't always shared by elected and fisheries management officials. I am happy to report that our elected officials and candidates for public office are beginning to take notice of these important issues and CCA's growing influence.

With polls indicating that the State of Washington is in for another nail-biter election for Governor, both candidates are staking out their positions on CCA-supported initiatives, such as harvest reform, selective fishing, hatchery reform and the removal of derelict fishing gear ("ghost nets"). This positive development bodes well for those of us who believe a fundamental change in priorities is urgently needed to restore and recover our salmon and steelhead populations.

The jockeying began in earnest this July when Washington Democratic Governor Chris Gregoire issued a letter to the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) Commission requesting a report on efforts to move all non-tribal fisheries to fully selective. The Governor's letter also requested an update on the State's implementation of hatchery reform efforts, an economic analysis of the value of commercial and recreational fisheries, and a plan for expanding recreational fishing-related tourism. CCA followed up on the Governor's letter with a letter of our own that provided specific recommendations to the Governor for implementing these common-sense policies.

Former Republican State Senator Dino Rossi entered the debate in August by releasing an official campaign position on fishing in Washington State. The policy document contained a strong endorsement of selective harvest for salmon. The document also contained a solid commitment to support funding and implementation of Washington's hatchery reform efforts and provides a pledge for the \$6 million needed to remove high-priority derelict fishing gear from Puget Sound. It is important to note that the policy positions released by the campaign closely mirror the agenda items and policy statements developed by CCA Washington.

Not to be outdone, in early October the Gregoire Campaign issued its own official campaign position on "Protecting and Reforming Washington's Fisheries." The document provided strong endorsements of hatchery reform implementation, converting state-managed fisheries to selective fisheries, derelict fishing gear removal, and the need to put conservation first in future harvest and hatchery management decisions. Both the Gregoire and Rossi campaign documents cited CCA's leadership on these issues.

CCA Washington will continue to highlight the need to put conservation first in WDFW's management of our fisheries. In advance of the 2009 legislative session, CCA joined several other allied groups to send a questionnaire to every legislative candidate seeking election this November. Candidates were asked about their support for mark-selective fishing implementation

and harvest reform, funding for hatcheries and ghost net removal. The letter sent a powerful -- and unified -- message of the wide public support that exists for fisheries conservation.

In the meantime, CCA Oregon is also actively preparing for the 2009 legislative session and has hired a lobbyist to advocate for harvest reform in Salem. And, CCA continues to engage at the Federal level with Members of Congress and will engage with members of the new Presidential Administration in January.

The active involvement of CCA's members is critical to our current efforts and future success. If you have an interest in getting involved in CCA's advocacy efforts through the Government Relations Committee (GRC), please contact CCA Washington GRC Chairman Ed Wickersham (cairnmm@msn.com) or CCA Oregon GRC Chairman Jim Marquoit (marquoit@msn.com).

Copies of the documents referenced in this article can be obtained online at CCA Pacific Northwest's website - www.ccapnw.org