

COASTAL CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION

*Resource-First
Science-Based
Advocates for Marine Resources*



BRIEFING DOCUMENT for Protect Our Salmon Act

*Ensuring the sustainability of a vital
natural and economic resource*

The Issue...

Oregon's wild salmon and steelhead runs, a vital natural resource, have dramatically declined, with many runs either extinct or endangered. While billions of dollars have been spent on recovery through habitat, hydro and hatchery improvements, a key issue has often been overlooked: the methods used to harvest salmon.

The commercial fishing gear currently used in Columbia River salmon fisheries includes gill nets and tangle nets. Gill nets are designed to snare fish by the gills, leading to injury, suffocation and death. Due to their indiscriminate and destructive nature, gill nets and tangle nets kill or injure large numbers of Endangered Species Act-listed and wild salmon, steelhead and other species. Ironically, Oregon – which strives to be a global leader in sustainability – is one of the few states in the country to still allow gill nets.

Banning the use of gill nets and tangle nets and using gear that can selectively harvest hatchery fish – while allowing for the release of wild fish – is an effective, achievable way to help recover wild salmon and steelhead and create a sustainable fishery. It provides a greater return on the investment that taxpayers have contributed to salmon recovery, and is consistent with Oregon's commitment to the responsible and sustainable use of the state's natural resources.

An initiative to sustain and recover Oregon's salmon runs. The Protect Our Salmon Act bans the use of non-selective gill nets and tangle nets in Oregon waters -- including the Columbia River -- for catching salmon and other food fish. The Act also calls for the use of selective harvest practices.

Commercial Fishing Jobs Maintained. To minimize any economic impact to commercial fishermen who currently use gill nets or tangle nets, the Act establishes a fund (and appropriate oversight) to compensate commercial fishermen for the transition to alternative, selective gear that can harvest returning hatchery fish while protecting endangered wild salmon and steelhead populations.

Tribal fishing rights remain intact. The Protect Our Salmon Act is not intended to affect any tribal fishing rights, or the right to use any fishing gear allowed under tribal fishing rights in the waters of the state of Oregon established by laws, treaty or otherwise.

Coastal Conservation Association

BACKGROUND ON PROTECT OUR SALMON ACT

The worldwide emphasis on sustainability puts Oregon's commitment to conservation in the spotlight. The state's longstanding leadership on issues such as water quality, recycling, transportation and energy has nurtured a growing number of industries, policies and practices aimed at balancing economic health with the sustainability of Oregon's natural resources.

Oregon's failure to protect and enhance the state's wild salmon runs threatens the state's credibility as a leader in conservation. Wild salmon, an important natural and economic resource, remain on the brink of extinction in many areas. Each year taxpayers, electric utility rate payers and others collectively contribute about \$1 billion to recovery efforts, yet more than half of our region's salmon runs are extinct and others are in decline.

A key issue has been overlooked in efforts to recover the state's salmon runs: the method of harvest. Currently, the commercial fishing gear used in many areas of the state (gill nets and tangle nets) is non-selective and kills large numbers of ESA-listed and wild salmon and steelhead. Gill nets are designed to "gill" fish snared in the nets, leading to injury, suffocation and death before unharmed release is possible. Nearly all marine life that gets caught in a gill net dies, from salmon and steelhead to seals and seabirds. Oregon is one of the few places in the country to still allow gill nets, a method clearly at odds with the state's long-standing commitment to sustainable practices.

Coastal Conservation Association is advancing an initiative to protect wild salmon and create sustainable salmon harvests. The Protect Our Salmon Act bans the use of gill nets and tangle nets in Oregon waters, including the Columbia River, and calls for the use of selective harvest practices.

To minimize any economic impact to commercial fishermen who currently use gill nets or tangle nets, the Act establishes a fund (and appropriate oversight) to compensate commercial fishermen for the transition to alternative, selective gear that can harvest returning hatchery fish while protecting endangered wild salmon and steelhead populations. This selective gear was commonly used decades ago in Oregon's waters and is currently being tested by state and tribal officials in Washington State.

The Act does not affect any tribal fishing rights, or the right to use any fishing gear allowed under tribal fishing rights in the waters of the state of Oregon established by laws, treaty or otherwise.

Banning the use of gill nets and tangle nets and using selective gear that allows for the release of wild fish is an effective, achievable way to create a sustainable commercial and recreational fishery for the citizens of Oregon. It provides a greater return on the investment that taxpayers have contributed to salmon recovery, and is consistent with Oregon's commitment to the responsible and sustainable use of the state's natural resources.



News Release

Coastal Conservation Association

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CCA Helps Launch Ballot Initiative to Recover Oregon's Iconic Salmon Runs

PORTLAND – Coastal Conservation Association is launching a ballot initiative to help save the last remnants of Oregon's iconic wild salmon runs, and to create a sustainable salmon fishery for current and future generations. The Protect Our Salmon Act would ban the use of gill nets and tangle nets in Oregon waters, including the Columbia River. The Act calls for the use of commercial fishing practices that selectively harvest returning hatchery fish, while protecting endangered wild salmon, steelhead and other species.

"Oregon's failure to protect and enhance our wild salmon runs threatens the state's credibility as a leader in sustainability," said Dave Schamp, Chairman of Coastal Conservation Association's Oregon Board of directors and a chief petitioner of the initiative. "Each year taxpayers, electric utility rate payers and others collectively contribute about \$1 billion to recovery efforts, yet wild salmon, an important natural and economic resource for our state, remain on the brink of extinction."

While habitat, hydro and hatchery improvements are important to salmon recovery efforts, a key issue has been overlooked: the method of harvest. Currently, the commercial fishing gear used in the Columbia River (gill nets and tangle nets) is non-selective and kills large numbers of ESA-listed and wild salmon and steelhead. Gill nets are designed to "gill" fish snared in the nets, leading to injury, suffocation and death before unharmed release is possible. Nearly all marine life that gets caught in a gill net dies, from salmon and steelhead to seals and seabirds. Oregon is one of the few places in the country to still allow gill nets, a method clearly at odds with the state's long-standing commitment to sustainable practices.

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To minimize any economic impact to commercial fishermen who currently use gill nets or tangle nets, the Act establishes a fund (and appropriate oversight) to compensate commercial fishermen for the transition to alternative, selective gear.

The Act does not affect any tribal fishing rights, or the right to use any fishing gear allowed under tribal fishing rights in the waters of the state of Oregon established by laws, treaty or otherwise.

CCA members will immediately begin to gather signatures to place this issue on the ballot in November of 2010.

“Banning the use of gill nets and tangle nets and using selective gear that allows for the release of wild fish is an effective, achievable way to create a sustainable commercial and recreational fishery for the citizens of Oregon,” said Schamp. “It provides a greater return on the investment that taxpayers have contributed to salmon recovery, and is consistent with Oregon’s commitment to the responsible and sustainable use of the state’s natural resources.”

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Coastal Conservation Association is a non-profit organization comprised of 200 chapters in 17 coastal states spanning the Gulf of Mexico, Atlantic and Pacific coasts. In 2007, CCA expanded into the Pacific Northwest and the organization has quickly grown to more than 9,000 members and continues to launch chapters in both Oregon and Washington. As the largest marine conservation organization in the country, CCA’s grassroots influence is felt through state capitals, U.S. Congress and, most importantly, in the conservation and restoration of our marine resources.