

Intro

Good Morning Chair Roblan and Chair Witt, members of the Senate Committee on Rural Communities and Economic Development, members of the House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources.

My name is Eric Farm. I live in North Bend, Oregon and grew up outside of Astoria in the small town of Svensen and then St. Helens. As you might imagine, fish and fishing have been a huge part of my life.

Coos County STEP Commission Board of Directors, which owns the Morgan Ck Fish Hatchery and serve as an umbrella organization for multiple STEP groups in the Coos County area

Recently appointed Commissioner to Oregon Intl Port of Coos Bay

Former Bay Area Chamber of Commerce President

All volunteer positions, working to make SW Oregon a better place to live.

As a forester, I am proud of the efforts our industry has made, working extremely close with the watershed associations, the ODFW and other state agencies to improve our fisheries. The timber industry continues to spend millions of dollars on stream habitat improvement projects, stream crossing improvements, and the purchase of land and construction of fishery education and hatchery facilities.

These hatchery and education centers were purchased and built by donations for our local timber companies, tribes, and community organizations. Nearly \$2 million dollars later and almost a decade later, we have a fully functioning hatchery and education center that is run by STEP volunteers and school kids. ODFW provides wonderful biologists to coordinate the hatchery activities but, these programs depend on volunteers to operate.

Diversify your economy

Southern Oregon has been trying for decades to replace the lost jobs and tax revenue from the decline in federal timber harvests.

A major success story has been our communities support for the STEP programs and the hands on learning that occurs at our hatchery and education centers.

These hatcheries produce millions of Fall Chinook and Winter Steelhead which return to provide world class fishing opportunities for our residents and visitors alike.

In 2011, according to the ODFW's estimates, over 15,000 salmon and steelhead were caught on the Coos and Coquille River systems. Travel Oregon estimates that each of these fish brings in over \$300 of economic activity to our local community. That's over \$4.6 million per year that is well distributed throughout every corner of our community. This money is in hotels, restaurants, tackle shops, gas stations, boat repair shops, boat supplies, grocery stores, RV parks, the list just goes on and on.

We have been told over and over that we must diversify our economy and to quit relying on timber. Although as a forester I don't agree with that statement; never the less, our communities have made an effort to do just that. And now the programs that provide unparalleled hands-on learning for our kids, food for poverty-stricken families, and much needed tourism dollars are at risk.

Why are these changes necessary?

The premise of this entire plan is that there is no fish conservation crisis, only that fish abundance number are less than what they were in 1800. I am curious why that comment was even added to this plan. There is no way to turn back the clock to the conditions that were present in the 1800s so why would we even consider that as a goal or benchmark that we must be compared to. Why not set realistic goals for what we are trying to achieve?

No scientific study has been presented as to why we should be reducing our hatchery production and removing hatchery angling opportunities from entire river systems. Current data on the Coos River Fall Chinook run indicates the hatchery stray rate is below the 10% goal. And harvest tag data indicates that in 2011, 81% of the fish caught in the Coos Basin were hatchery fish. This fishery is performing exactly how we want it to and for that, we must make changes to reduce angling and education opportunities. I just don't understand.

The portfolio approach seems to be arbitrary as to location and magnitude of the changes. All zones except the Mid-South Coast saw increases in their hatchery production, while we had significant reductions and redistribution of fish. Anglers in our area are irate that this proposal adds more fish to already crowded rivers such as the South Fork Coquille, and takes fantastic bank fishing opportunities from anglers on the South Coos River. The South Coos River is a fishery that is low on the river just above tide and allows anglers without the resources to buy a drift boat or buy a guided fishing trip the opportunity to catch winter-steelhead. This isn't just a recreation opportunity, these fish provide their families with wholesome food that they depend on to survive.

State of the art hatchery practices

The hatchery practices used on the southern Oregon coast use state of the art hatchery practices and incorporate wild broodstock into our hatchery gene pool. I can't speak for all hatcheries, but the hatcheries that I work with produce fish with the genetics of our "wild" population.

The use of these modern hatchery practices and any potential impact on naturally spawning fish has not been studied. And without scientific justification, I can't fathom why ODFW would propose to reduce angling and educational opportunities. These reductions would be another slam to a community that doesn't need more bad news.

No effort has been made to evaluate what, if any, the impact of our hatchery reared fish are having on the naturally spawning population. We have data on numbers of hatchery fish that have strayed up the rivers beyond the hatcheries, but there is no scientific data that shows the natural spawners on the Coos and Coquille rivers are being negatively impacted?

The reality is we have some of the most productive naturally spawning populations of along the entire Oregon coast. Until we see some sound science based on our local conditions, there is absolutely no reason that we need to reduce anything we are doing with our hatchery programs on the south coast. If anything, we have the volunteers, school kids, and massive esstuary to handle more fish.

Impact on hatcheries

We are told that the changes being proposed are minimal and there is no need for concern. That may be true if you sum all the additions and reductions up and down the coast, but the reality is, we the current plan reduces hatchery releases from Coos/Coquille by 169,000 fish. Even if one percent of those fish return and are caught, that adds up to over \$½ million into our local economy. Who or what is going to offset this arbitrary impact on our community? \$½ million dollars is a rounding error when you deal with the state budget, but that is a really big number in Coos County where we have been scraping by for decades. Our families can't be asked to take on a burden of this magnitude.

This plan does offer to mitigate some of these losses. There is a proposal to add 100,000 spring Chinook to netpens in lower Coos Bay. On the surface this sounds like a great plan, except two similar net pen spring Chinook programs were discontinued years ago by the ODFW because of unacceptably high straying and impacts on naturally spawning fall Chinook. What new science says these fish will be acceptable and this program discontinued at some point in the future? These fish are being used to offset reduction in a totally different and amazingly successful fall Chinook hatchery program with the labor coming from school kids. When this program is determined to be unacceptable at some point down the road, we will have lost this "offset". Additionally this project is currently unfunded and at this point basically a well-intentioned dream. This is not an acceptable offset to the loss of 169,000 fish from our hatchery and education centers.

Social Impact

The communities on the southern Oregon coast are some of the most poverty stricken in the entire state and have been for decades. The reduction in bank angling opportunities and further restriction on annual bag limits will take food out of the freezer for families that need these fish the most.

We call this recreational fishing, but for many rural Oregonians struggling to make ends meet, hunting and fishing and not the grocery store meat department is what puts food on the table. Let's not forget that we are not just talking about vacations and tourists, many of these fish are feeding the hungry in our state. When the South Coos River no longer has hatchery fish released at the 5 Mile Bridge and the state determines for one reason or another that there aren't enough fish to allow harvest of naturally spawning steelhead, who is going to help these families that are doing their best to help themselves?

What doesn't make sense

Plan fails to balance the social, economic, and environmental needs of our community.

There is no identified conservation crisis or scientific basis for reducing our very successful programs.

Little is actually being done on the ground to reduce predation, an impact that may be taking half of our smolts before they enter the ocean

This plan does not account for the social or economic damages this plan will have on our community.

On behalf of the Coos County STEP Commission and thousands of concerned anglers, community members, and school kids, I ask that funding for the Coastal Multispecies Conservation and Management Plan be suspended until scientifically sound analysis of the social, environmental and economic costs can be accurately weighed against their theoretical benefits.

I also extend an open invitation for any of you to come down and see our hatchery and education centers in action. We will have thousands of kids spawning fish this fall when school starts up again.