Questions for Dr. Bruce McIntosh (ODFW) on Ten Willamette River Basin Fish Issues

Answers to the following questions may be relevant to understanding the status of wild fish issues in the Willamette River Basin, including the Clackamas, Molalla, Santiam, Calapooya and McKenzie Rivers.

1. While the new marine mammal control options provided by Congress enable ODFW to remove California Sea Lions from the Willamette Falls Fishway, some issues remain unresolved:

Q: Does ODFW have authority to manage or remove Stellar Sea Lions (SSL) from Willamette Falls?

Q: If so, does ODFW have the infrastructure to trap and remove the SSL's which are twice as large as California Sea Lions (CSL)?

Q: What are the funding sources that ODFW uses to manage marine mammals at Willamette Falls, currently, and in the future?

Q: How much funding comes from each source?

2. ODFW touts that Sea lion removal from the Falls is responsible for the large increase in wild winter steelhead passing Willamette Falls (WF).

Q: What scientifically reliable methods of study and observation did ODFW apply to be able to reach this conclusion?

3. The counts of wild winter steelhead over WF were 5,778 fish in 2016, and then dropped to 822 fish in 2017, climbed back up to 1,829 fish in 2018, and have already exceeded 3,000 wild winter steelhead in 2019.

Q: What other factors could be attributed to the increasing wild winter fish numbers passing WF?

Q: Does ODFW have spawning escapement and egg deposition criteria or goals for wild spring chinook and winter steelhead in each river in which there are unique populations?

4. The Conservation and Recovery Plan for Spring Chinook recommends treating each WR sub basin as a unique population, each with its own criteria for recovery. The purpose of these restrictions on hatchery stock transfers within the sub basins of the upper WR continue is to preserve the genetic structure of the current populations.

Q: How will ODFW justify raising spring chinook from the McKenzie River and releasing them in Upper WR tributaries?

5. ODFW stocks non-native hatchery summer steelhead and hatchery rainbow trout in reservoirs and rivers throughout the Willamette Basin.

Q: How does ODFW know that the hatchery steelhead smolts and the hatchery trout are not eating wild and hatchery spring chinook or wild winter steelhead juveniles as they migrate downriver?

Q: Has ODFW done any research to evaluate the competition and predation effects from the hatchery programs on the wild fish that are the target of the restoration efforts?

6. The COE has extensive mitigation obligations based on the losses of fish, fisheries and recreation for the 14 flood control dams in the Willamette Basin.

Q: Is the COE meeting its obligations under the current mitigation agreement?
Q: In terms of pounds of fish released?
Q: In terms of cooperative management and conservation with ODFW?
Q: Can you provide a DETAILED list of where it is NOT meeting its obligations?

7. ODFW has produced and released non-native "Skamania-stock" summer run steelhead in the WRB since the 1970's

Q: Who pays to produce these fish?
Q: What is the "cost per adult landed" in the summer steelhead program?
Q: What adverse impacts are you aware of from the summer steelhead program?
Q: Why does NOAA seems to tolerate use of the "Skamania stock" in the Willamette when its policy has been to recommend against its use in Puget Sound and even in some portions of the Columbia River?

8. ODFW argues that hatcheries are not a conservation problem for wild spring chinook and wild winter steelhead, and that they are essential for recovery.

Q: Can ODFW provide credible data on the number of wild ESA-listed spring chinook that return to the Clackamas, Molalla, Santiam, Calapooia, McKenzie and Upper Willamette over the past two decades, compared to the total passage of spring chinook passing Willamette Falls?

9. River flows and water quality in the Willamette and its main tributaries are essential for successful juvenile migration to the estuary.

Q: How many instream water rights remain unfulfilled in the Willamette and its tributaries.

Q: How do the algal blooms in the main reservoirs in the Willamette affect anadromous fish productivity and survival?

Q: Is ODFW involved in the allocation of Detroit Reservoir water and will ODFW be able to protect instream flows for ESA-listed spring chinook and wild winter steelhead?

10. Hatcheries on the Santiam and the McKenzie Rivers operate under expired water quality permits issued by DEQ. Both rivers supply drinking water to Oregon's second and third largest cities.

Q: Can ODFW guarantee that chemicals used to control disease in these hatcheries are not contributing to water quality issues facing these important municipal drinking water sources?