

I would like to encourage support for H.B. 3150

Years ago my family and I were volunteers with the S.T.E.P. program. Our property is at the upper end of the Coquille river system and we were asked to help with tending to hatch boxes. Other volunteers brought us the supplies and helped set it all up and in a few weeks we got our first batch of salmon eggs. Every day as we did our chores on our ranch we checked on two hatch boxes, each box would have thousands of eggs. For the next 10 or so years we would release 8 to 10 thousand chinook smolts, then we would get about the same number of coho, and then steelhead. We checked the hatch boxes every day from early December to April, and in a few years we started seeing the number of fish in our creek increase. There were many other volunteers doing the same thing in most of the tributaries of the Coquille river, fish numbers increased, the program was successful.

When the STEP program was stopped, we were told the reason for not continuing was that the streams were fish saturated for the available spawning habitat. There were lots of fish returning, fish were going up smaller feeder streams and things looked good. As time went on we watched as the State of Oregon implemented more and more regulations on land owners, commercial fishermen, sport fishermen, and spent huge sums of money. All of this is done to improve water quality and fish habitat and now fish numbers are back to about what they were when the STEP program was started. Everyone can find fault as to why our fish are not doing well. The list is too long to include here.

The question is as elected leaders in Oregon do you make a change and support a program that was very successful, was cost effective because of lots of volunteers and was very popular with the public. Or continue on with what has not been successful. I encourage you to support HB 3150.

Respectfully,

Neil Westfall