



**The House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources: HB 2661
Chair Witt, Vice-Chairs Breese-Iverson and Hudson, and Members of the Committee**

Testimony from David Moskowitz, Executive Director, The Conservation Angler

HB 2661 Needs Work before it Deserves Support

Funding Issues to address:

The current bill does not direct the program to address a particular watershed or region. Therefore, it may conflict or overlap with current Pike Minnow Bounty programs in the Columbia River.

The current bill proposes to use General Fund to pay for the implementation. This is an inappropriate use of GF monies. ODFW could pay for a program envisioned under HB 2661 through License funds. Program proponents could also apply for funding through one of the many project-oriented stakeholder groups within ODFW such as the Restoration and Enhancement Board (R&E) or the Salmon Trout Enhancement Program (STEP) which regularly provide funding for watershed-specific programs.

Ecological Issues to Address:

While the presence of Umpqua Pike Minnow in the Rogue River watershed is a serious concern, it is important to keep in mind that the Pikeminnow is a native Oregon fish in many watersheds, and co-evolved with salmon, trout, and steelhead. The predator-prey relationships are not all one-sided in watersheds where there are not large-scale impoundments or other degradation – which definitely favors the pikeminnow over the salmonids.

While many anglers consider pikeminnows and fish such as suckers and whitefish as so-called “trash-fish” which neglects to consider the ecological role that these fish play in providing nutrients and even food sources for salmon, trout, and steelhead. The bottom line is that when Oregon rivers are healthy and free-flowing, pike minnow predation is very unlikely to be a problem for salmonids.

Program Performance Issues:

The current Columbia River Northern Pike Minnow Bounty Program is funded via rate-payer dollars from Bonneville Power Administration to reduce predation on juvenile salmonids migrating downstream through the slack-water reservoirs behind Columbia River dams. That environment promotes the growth and spawning success of the Pikeminnow that is out of balance with salmonids. However, while the Bounty Program results in the removal of many adult Pikeminnows, there is no ability to assess the actual efficacy of the program because there never a baseline determination on the numbers of Pike Minnows at the start of the program, nor has there been any detailed assessment of the health of the overall Pike Minnow population recently.

The Bounty program removes an estimated 10 to 20% of the larger adult Northern Pike Minnow from the Columbia. The program is believed to have reduced “predation on young salmon and steelhead by up to 40% from pre-program levels.” This figure only makes sense if you were able to calculate overall mortality on juvenile salmonids from all sources (birds, fish, mammals, disease, pollution, downstream dam passage, etc.). Since 1991, 5.2 million Pikeminnows have been harvested (an average of 173,300 fish annually) at a cost between \$2 to 6.4 million annually. Averaged over the 30-year program life, it means that BPA ratepayers have paid \$17.30 per Pikeminnow harvested in the Columbia River – all without clear benefits to the wild salmonids.

The Conservation Angler believes HB 2661 would be a poor expenditure of Oregon’s General Fund!