

SB 1509 -1 STAFF MEASURE SUMMARY

Senate Committee On Natural Resources and Wildfire

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Sub-Referral To: Joint Committee On Ways and Means

Meeting Dates: 2/8

WHAT THE MEASURE DOES:

The measure eliminates the lottery for Columbia River gillnet vessel permits, reaffirms that no new vessel permits may be issued in the absence of the lottery, directs the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission to establish a program to purchase and retire inactive permits through January 2026, and prohibits a person from transferring or selling an inactive permit to a party other than the Commission. It also requires the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) to provide a report on the Columbia River gillnet fishery to a natural resources-related interim legislative committee by September 15, 2024, and specifies report requirements. The measure declares an emergency and is effective on passage.

FISCAL: May have fiscal impact, but no statement yet issued

REVENUE: May have revenue impact, but no statement yet issued

ISSUES DISCUSSED:

EFFECT OF AMENDMENT:

-1 The amendment removes the program to purchase and retire inactive permits and the prohibition on a person from transferring or selling an inactive permit to a party other than the Commission. It also removes the ODFW report on the Columbia River gillnet fishery. The amendment adds new provisions requiring ODFW to convene a workgroup to develop recommendations on a voluntary Columbia River gillnet vessel permit buyback program, and to report on those recommendations to a natural resources-related legislative committee by November 15, 2024.

FISCAL: May have fiscal impact, but no statement yet issued

REVENUE: May have revenue impact, but no statement yet issued

BACKGROUND:

Gillnetting is a fishing method that uses a wall of netting that is vertically suspended by floats along the top of the water and weights along the bottom. Mesh sizes are designed to allow fish to only fit their heads through the netting, and then their gills typically get caught in the mesh as the fish tries to back out of the net.

Commercial and tribal gillnetters catch shad, smelt, sturgeon, and salmon on the Columbia River. The States of Oregon and Washington work in partnership under the Columbia River Interstate Compact to set commercial fishing seasons and coordinate regulations on the lower Columbia River.

In Oregon, gillnet vessels must obtain a vessel permit to legally operate in the Columbia River gillnet salmon fishery. Vessel permits carry an annual fee and permits can be transferable. Currently no new vessel permits may be issued in Oregon with the exception of those issued through a state lottery system. If the total number of permits renewed for the upcoming calendar year falls below 200, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife issues permits by a lottery system to return to a maximum of 200 total vessel permits in the state.

In Washington, gillnet vessels must obtain a vessel license for an annual fee in order to operate. In 2022, the Washington state legislature enacted a voluntary buyback program to reduce commercial licenses in the state. In the first program phase, inactive and active license holders were eligible to receive specified amounts of buyback

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compensation. In the second program phase, license holders set their own prices with specified maximums in a reverse auction. Prior to the program, there were 240 commercial Columbia River salmon gillnet fishing licenses. After the program concluded in June 2023, 67 Washington licenses remained.

PRELIMINARY