



Pacific Rivers
1001 SE Water Ave Ste. 450
Portland, OR 97214

Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Wildfire
Attn: Senator Jeff Golden
900 Court St. NE, S-421
Salem, Oregon 97301

RE: SB 512 Relating to the Rock Creek Hatchery; declaring an emergency.

March 26, 2025

Dear Senator Golden, Senator Nash and Members of the Committee,

My name is Michael Morrison and I am the Chair of the Board of Directors of Pacific Rivers, a conservation organization based in Portland. Pacific Rivers advocates for healthy watershed ecosystems in the West, particularly in the face of our changing climate. Pacific Rivers is a member of the North Umpqua Coalition (NUC), a group dedicated to preserving and protecting the North Umpqua River. We've been involved in decades of conservation efforts in the basin. I write on behalf of this organization, with regards to SB 512 to strongly urge your "no" vote.

No doubt you are familiar with the history of this issue, but I will briefly review. In 2022, the duly appointed Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission, after proper notice and a hearing, voted to eliminate the summer steelhead hatchery program at Rock Creek in order to protect the extremely important and valuable North Umpqua wild summer steelhead. A court challenge followed, and, initially, the Circuit Court issued a temporary injunction against the Commission's action. The court challenge proceeded and eventually made its way to the Oregon Supreme Court. After years of litigation (and with the temporary order keeping a summer steelhead hatchery program in place) the Supreme Court ruled against the parties opposing the Commission's duly considered decision. Without detailing the legal maneuverings currently in play, the Circuit Court withdrew its temporary order as the Supreme Court decision made clear that those challenging the Commission were not likely to prevail in the end. At this point, the Administrative and Judicial processes have been carefully followed and the decision to terminate the summer hatchery steelhead program is in place.

Separately, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife studied the future of hatchery programs in Oregon from a number of perspectives, including climate change and cost. It was made clear in that study that the cost of rebuilding the Rock Creek Hatchery—destroyed by wildfire—would be extremely high (I recall as much as \$50 million total) and that rebuilding the structure would be futile as climate change has resulted in loss of the cold-water resources necessary to a successful hatchery program at that location.

As I read it, SB 512 would declare an emergency. I have to ask, what emergency? Nothing in the bill is instructive on this point. SB 512 also references \$1.4 million in the general fund (likely otherwise appropriated) to carry out the directive of the bill (to operate a hatchery at the fire-destroyed Rock Creek location). Even based on pre-fire data, ODFW's recent hatchery facility assessment found that Rock Creek Hatchery was the least economically feasible of Oregon state's hatcheries. To state the obvious, \$1.4 million isn't nearly enough to fund the mandate. Finally, in the language of the bill itself, can the Committee explain how SB 512 would preserve the "public peace, health, and safety"?

We strongly urge your "no" vote on SB 512. Setting aside the financial perspective, the Commission got it right when it realized and concluded that the public good would be served by eliminating the North Umpqua summer steelhead hatchery program. The decision was made after careful consideration of the issue, scientific study and plenty of public comment and input. North Umpqua summer steelhead are a valuable resource to the people of Oregon (and beyond) and are worthy of protection. There is a body of research that demonstrates there can no longer be any debate that wild fish are superior survivors to hatchery fish. We humans owe a duty to the creatures with which we share the earth to protect them—including the summer steelhead of the North Umpqua.

Thank you for considering these comments.

Sincerely,

Michael Morrison
Board Chair, Pacific Rivers
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