

Memorandum

To: Chair Golden, Vice Chair Nash, members of the Committee

Fr: David Moskowitz, Wild Fish and Rivers Advocate

I appreciate the opportunity to testify with you today remotely.

I testified in support of HB 2343 in the House Ag & Nat Resources Committee on January 29.

As passed by your colleagues in the House, HB 2343 was amended to shorten the sunset on this program known as the Columbia Basin Endorsement (a supplemental angling tag required if you fish in the Oregon portion of the Columbia Basin).

This program has received multiple extensions via Legislative action. ODFW has proposed that this additional angling endorsement be made a permanent element of the angling license package but there are some issues to address before this program is ever made a permanent license feature.

Each time the extension approaches proponents and opponents note that there are changes in the purpose and need for this funding mechanism. While the endorsement was configured as a means to implement Columbia River fishing reforms - this means different things to sport anglers, commercial anglers and conservation organizations. Despite the interest in change, little of substance has been discussed in the interim or raised during Legislative hearings, and little changes on the Columbia River.

Funds from this endorsement support fishery monitoring of catch and hopefully spawning escapement, as well as fishery enforcement efforts. Endorsement funds also support hatchery production for the so-called “off-channel” fisheries in places like Youngs Bay, Blind Slough and elsewhere. These hatchery fish are raised in state hatcheries and reared in net pens in the off-channel areas. Fish released from the net pens attract many predators that also prey on wild juvenile salmonids. Returning adult salmonids attract predators as well - including sport anglers (who likely catch quite a few of these fish which are meant to provide adult salmon for the the Columbia River gillnet fishery) and of course, the gillnet fleet.

No matter how it is supposed to work - these returning net pen salmon also stray into rivers and streams in Oregon and Washington and cause problems for recovering wild salmon that are also heading to their home waters. The three weak stocks that constrain many of the Columbia River fisheries are lower Columbia Tule fall chinook, lower Columbia River coho and chum salmon. Both wild fall chinook and coho salmon suffer from too many hatchery fish on the spawning grounds - the net pens are part of this problem.

Nevertheless, funding for monitoring and fishery enforcement is critical to maintaining multiple populations of Columbia and Snake River wild salmon and steelhead. The Legislature is wise to support this portion of HB 2343.

However, the funding for hatchery salmonid production is hampering any chance at recovery for wild salmon in the Columbia River - particularly in the lower Columbia. The off channel net pen programs have never been adequately evaluated by state or federal agencies. Oregon needs to

evaluate net pen impacts on wild salmonids so they are better understood. These fishing areas are called "Safe Areas" but they are "SAFE" in name only for wild salmon.

As an Oregon license buyer contributing annually to this program - seeing a more complete explanation of what the endorsement pays for, understanding what we know as well as what we do not know about the program's impact on wild salmonids would be helpful before this endorsement is reauthorized again in 6 years.

Returning to the bottomline, the Committee should pass this bill on to the Senate Floor - but require ODFW to evaluate the programs funded by the surcharge - there should be a rigorous review of this program undertaken and completed before ODFW brings a subsequent renewal forward for Legislative consideration. ODFW should also work closely with commercial fishers, sportfishers, local communities as well as conservation and watershed restoration organizations to accomplish this review and evaluation.

Please pass HB 2343 but ensure the legislative history outlines the expectations of the stakeholders to review program effectiveness.