

Salmon economic act tackles urgent fiscal, environmental crisis

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

New Legislation Will Restore Sound Science and Fiscal Responsibility to Federal Salmon Recovery Efforts

Representatives of a broad-based coalition of fishing businesses, conservation groups, and taxpayer and energy advocates this week lauded new bi-partisan Congressional legislation that would restore sound science and fiscal responsibility to failing federal salmon recovery efforts in the Pacific Northwest. Rep. Jim McDermott (D-WA) and Rep. Tom Petri (R-WI) introduced the Salmon Economic Analysis and Planning Act (SEAPA) in the House of Representatives on Tuesday. The bill authorizes independent economic and scientific review of federal salmon restoration efforts in the Pacific Northwest by the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) and the Government Accountability Office (GAO). Challenging the status quo while calling for an approach that puts all recovery options, including lower Snake dam removal, on the table, Congressman McDermott said, "I'm not willing to practice the politics of extinction, doing nothing until there is nothing left to do, until there are no more wild salmon left to save. I'm willing to listen, but I'm not willing to wait." Failure to protect and restore endangered wild salmon in the Columbia and Snake River Basin to healthy, sustainable levels has cost United States taxpayers and Northwest ratepayers billions of dollars over the past two decades. Declining runs have curtailed fisheries and hurt regional economies throughout the Pacific salmon states of Alaska, California, Oregon, Washington and Idaho. "We have a responsibility to make sure that the wild salmon of the Snake River and the rest of the Columbia Basin in the Pacific Northwest survive and thrive for future generations. Current efforts appear to be inadequate, despite being costly," said Congressman Petri. "We have to be willing to do some fresh thinking and take the right actions before it's too late." Federal recovery efforts have been stymied and taxpayer dollars misdirected, in large part, due to incomplete and outdated information. "Much of the data we are relying on today to make critical decisions for the future of the region and the nation is nearly a decade old," said Nicole Cordan, policy and legal director for the Save Our Wild Salmon Coalition. "We need updated, comprehensive and unbiased information so we can evaluate, on a level playing field, all potential salmon recovery options, including but not limited to lower Snake River dam removal. This legislation would provide just that." The bill calls for an updated analysis by the GAO of previous studies on lower Snake Dam removal, including the 2002 Army Corps Environmental Impact Statement, in order to better understand the impact on local communities, freight transportation, irrigation, energy production, boating and recreation, and salmon recovery. It does not endorse or authorize lower Snake River dam removal, and provides no new authority to the Corps to call for such action. The proposed NAS study would examine the effectiveness of various federal salmon recovery actions (including all four "H's": habitat, harvest, hatchery and hydro), and other factors that may impact salmon populations, such as ocean conditions and global climate change. "It is time for a critical, impartial review of our current salmon recovery policies and scientifically credible options, so that we may advance a sound recovery plan for the future," said Congressman Earl Blumenauer (D-OR), one of the original co-sponsors of the bill. "We have spent more than \$8 billion dollars over 25 years to improve the Columbia and Snake River systems for fish, and still they are losing ground." Thirteen stocks of Columbia Basin salmon and steelhead, including all four remaining Snake River stocks, are currently listed as endangered or threatened under the Endangered Species Act. Populations of wild Snake River salmon have shown little improvement since being listed in the 1990s; most are hovering well below levels required for recovery. "The continuing downward trend is devastating rural communities. Fisheries are closing, recreational tourism is declining, businesses are laying off workers, and communities are suffering," said Liz Hamilton, executive director of the Northwest Sportsfishing Industry Association. "This is a real problem that needs real, honest solutions. We're headed for a political and economic train wreck if we don't stop pretending the status quo is working. We need to take a full and fair look at all our options for salmon recovery." The economic and scientific studies called for in SEAPA will also better prepare the federal government to ensure that it meets treaty obligations with Native American tribes and with Canada, as well as its legal obligations under the Endangered Species and Clean Water Acts. "If we don't alter our current course, taxpayers will continue to foot the bill for costly salmon recovery and will shoulder the massive cost of extinction as well," said Autumn Hanna, senior program director for Taxpayers for Common Sense. "We need an effective, fiscally responsible federal salmon recovery strategy that is based

on an examination of all available options including lower Snake River dam removal. We urge Congress to support this bill and authorize the necessary studies to vet this option and protect taxpayers from billions more in wasted dollars.â€• Copies of the legislation are available online at www.wildsalmon.org.

Salmon economic act tackles urgent fiscal, environmental crisis by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources