

The letter below was drafted and signed by five former WDFW Fish and Wildlife Commissioners and delivered to members of the Washington state Legislature in May 2019.

March 11, 2019

Dear Legislator,

We, the undersigned former Washington Fish and Wildlife Commissioners, took part in the development and approval of the Department's Hatchery and Harvest Reform Policy as well as its Columbia River Reform Policy. We are writing to voice our dismay that much of the progress that we made through these reforms is being reversed.

After too many years of arbitrarily picking numbers to placate various user groups, our Commission decided to take a more principled approach. Our "Hatchery and Harvest Reform Policy" was central to that effort. The policy announced commitments to: 1) the best available science; and 2) wild fish conservation as the highest priority. Those commitments were made to apply both to fish protected under the ESA where the law already requires such stewardship as well as to runs that have not been listed *where the law's protections are less rigorous.* Without such clear commitments to science and to conservation, we believed then, and still believe now, that the Department will be perpetually driven by pressures to maintain historical practices rather than moving towards a sustainable future.

The current Commission's decision to suspend belief in the science and relax standards in place that protect wild fish genetics was perplexing. That decision relegated conservation and science to positions subordinate to outside pressures. We are keenly aware that it takes courage and strength of commitment to bring an end to practices that science has shown are detrimental to wild fish recovery. The reform policies were designed to create incentives for more selective fisheries and impose disincentives on users employing old more harmful methods. ***The Columbia River policy called for a buyback of non-Indian gillnets that was never attempted.*** Only with a determined effort to move towards more selective harvest methods can we produce much greater numbers of hatchery fish without harm to wild fish genetics.

Some users assert that current wild fish genetics are not pure enough—nothing like the wild fish of old. They claim that it makes no sense to conserve those "mongrel" fish. Established science tells us otherwise: *if they are free from excessive hatchery influence,* naturally spawning fish will fairly quickly evolve and adapt to their home stream. By protecting naturally spawning fish, we are rebuilding genetically fit runs and protecting this fitness into the future.

For the state's non-tribal fishers, fishing is *not* a right, but a privilege. With the privilege comes a responsibility. Most users prefer not to adopt new fishing techniques, but everyone has a responsibility. We all are called upon to contribute through better forest practices, shoreline

development rules, and habitat restoration spending. Fishermen and women cannot be exempted.

The 2018 State of the Salmon report from the Governor's Office listed 13 of the 15 listed runs as "below the goal." Only two of the runs were "near the goal. Reversing the downward trajectory will take courage and commitment. The millions of dollars being spent on salmon habitat restoration will be largely wasted *if no additional wild fish are allowed to escape into the restored habitat*. We cannot return to a time when we fished without concern for wild fish runs. We cannot return to a state of ignorance about the importance of fish genetics.

Fish runs are the public's heritage. As stewards of those resources, we urge you take a stand. The Department needs your direction to resist the pressure to allow fishing methods of the past that are unsustainable in the long run. The best path forward can be found by following the lodestars of conservation and good science. We urge your support of those principles.

With respect,

Dr. Conrad Mahnken, Former Director, Manchester Research Station, NW Fisheries Science Center, WA Fish and Wildlife Commissioner 2006-2016

Rollie Schmitt, Former Director, National Marine Fisheries Service, NOAA, WA Fish and Wildlife Commissioner 2009-2014

Chuck Perry, Former Range Land Ecologist, WDFW, WA Fish and Wildlife Commissioner 2005-2013

Gary Douvia, Vice President, Raymond James, LLP, WA Fish and Wildlife Commissioner 2006-2013

Miranda Wecker, Former Director of the Marine Program, UW Olympic Natural Resources Center, WA Fish and Wildlife Commissioner 2005-2017