

***American Fisheries Society***

***Oregon Chapter***

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**MARCH 17, 1999**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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***THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION OF OUR OPINION PIECE!***

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***Comments By the Oregon Chapter of the American Fisheries Society Regarding the Listing of 9 Pacific Salmon Population Groups Under the Endangered Species Act***

The Oregon Chapter of the American Fisheries Society (ORAFS) is a volunteer organization of professionals in fisheries and aquatic sciences. The Chapter has over 500 members in Oregon, representing a diverse mix of scientists in federal, state, and tribal agencies, and in the private sector and higher education. The Oregon Chapter promotes scientific research and enlightened stewardship to conserve and recover healthy ecosystems and aquatic resources for sustainable, long-term use and enjoyment by the public. An important goal of ORAFS is to bring the best scientific information to bear on issues concerning the conservation and management of fishes and their ecosystems.

Pacific salmon are a regional icon of environmental quality, and have been the focus of cultural, religious and economic attention for centuries. To the indigenous peoples of western North America, salmon were an important seasonal food source and often the center of culturally rich religious traditions. They are important species in commercial fisheries and have been so since the mid-1800s. Salmon are much sought after by recreational fishers in salt and fresh water and form the basis of a regionally important sport fishing industry. Pacific salmon are the focus of environmental awareness and educational activities along the West Coast; many school children participate in a salmon project at one time or another during their primary education. Finally, salmon are important links between marine, freshwater, and terrestrial ecosystems by returning marine nutrients to streams and lakes, plants, and wildlife. For all these reasons, salmon conservation has become a high priority among the region's policy makers and the public.

The listing of an additional 9 salmon population groups to the list of threatened or endangered species - Ozette Lake sockeye. Hood Canal summer chum. Puget Sound

which one or more salmon populations are not listed under ESA or being proposed for listing. While the causes of salmon declines are complex, recent listing proposals should serve to reinforce the need for changes in the policies that govern Pacific salmon and their ecosystems. It should be clear that existing policies and institutions, however well intentioned, have not worked.

The AFS believes that the time for arguing whether salmon are or are not at risk of extinction has long passed. Their plight is apparent, and touches virtually the entire Pacific Northwest. Salmon link upland, aquatic, estuarine and marine environments, and their decline follows a consistent pattern over several species and a broad geographic region. This means something significant is happening to our ecological systems as a result of how our society uses natural resources. This is one of the first listing actions to directly impact a major urban area. Real, substantive changes will be needed, not only to save salmon from extinction but also to recover them to levels where traditional human uses of salmon can be restored. These changes will require a thorough examination of all policies and management actions affecting the salmon and their habitats. And the solution will require a different historical and ecological perspective by resource managers and the public. We are encouraged by Governor Kitzhaber's recent executive order to state agencies to actively work toward the conservation and recovery of salmon. We are also encouraged by the initial response of Portland City Commissioner Erik Sten and Washington Governor Gary Locke to undertake salmon recovery initiatives. The proof will be in the actions taken, however. As we proceed, it will be critically important for us as individuals and as a society to adapt to the constraints of functioning ecological systems. There is no way to hide the conclusion that change will require sacrifice from all of us. To help ensure that the changes made are based on the best available information, the Oregon Chapter of the AFS is prepared to continue contributing to the development of scientifically sound recovery strategies.

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