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Demonstrating they are not divided, Oregon's fisheries scientists adopted a resolution agreeing that it is necessary to breach the four federal dams on the Lower Snake River for salmon and steelhead runs to be restored to sustainable levels.

"The scientists have spoken clearly that breaching must be the central component of a successful recovery strategy for Snake River salmon and steelhead," said retired ODFW Chief of Fisheries Jim Martin. "The scientific choices are clear – now it's up to the people and their elected officials to choose the future for these fish."

The 500-member Oregon Chapter of the American Fisheries Society (Society) adopted the resolution without dissent at its annual conference February 17 in Eugene. Oregon Governor John Kitzhaber later announced his support for dam breaching at the Society's conference. Idaho's fisheries scientists adopted a similar resolution in 1999.

The Society's position is based largely on the conclusions of two in-depth scientific reviews – the Independent Scientific Advisory Review and the Plan for Analyzing and Testing Hypotheses. Both concluded that establishing more natural river conditions in the Snake and Columbia Rivers offers the best hope of preventing extinction of Snake River salmon. In a regional review of wild salmon and steelhead runs by Society member Chuck Huntington, the Snake River stood out from the rest of the Northwest because it has no healthy runs. Yet, the Snake River system contains the largest area of high-quality salmon habitat

remaining in the Northwest, including wilderness reaches in the Clearwater, Salmon, and Grande Ronde basins. Fish from these rivers must pass 8 dams to reach the ocean, whereas fish from healthier runs in the John Day River pass only 3 dams.

In the Grande Ronde basin, runs of spring chinook salmon have declined from 12,000 in the 1950s to less than 200 in the 1990s, according to research biologist Rich Carmichael. Recreational fishing has been closed since 1974 and tribal fishing is nearly eliminated.

Like many biologists in the Northwest, Kirk Schroeder, a past-president of the Society, has witnessed the precipitous decline of Snake River salmon during his research career. "In 1973, I counted sockeye salmon spawning in Redfish Lake, Idaho, 900 miles from the ocean," he said. "Then in 1998, I watched the remnants of this run confined to plastic tanks in a desperate attempt to rescue them from extinction. Ultimately, the public may decide to allow these sockeye and other Snake River salmon runs to go extinct; but if they do, it should be a conscious choice, not one that happens passively."

The Society also said substantive improvements in harvest management, hatchery practices, and habitat conditions will increase the success of fish recovery.

"Restoration actions of harvest, habitat, and hatcheries alone will not be sufficient to restore Snake River salmon," said Dr. Thomas Backman, senior scientist for the Columbia River Intertribal Fish Commission. "Breaching the dams is the biggest single step to bring these populations back from certain extinction."

"As biologists, it is our professional responsibility to take positions on important issues when the scientific information warrants it. Snake River salmon and steelhead may become functionally extinct in the next few decades, if the dams are not breached soon. We hope the political administrations and the

public will consider our position when they decide the future of these fish," said Dave Hohler, Society President.

The Oregon Chapter of the American Fisheries Society is a professional society of 500 fishery and aquatic scientists from state, federal, tribal, university, and private organizations. The Society is dedicated to advancing sound scientific knowledge and principles among its members and the public. The full text of the resolution can be found on the Society's web page at: http://osu.orst.edu/groups/orafs/news/news.html.

The Society's position is that:

1. The four lower Snake River dams are a significant threat to the continued existence of remaining Snake River salmon and steelhead stocks;
2. If society-at-large wishes to restore these salmonids to sustainable, fishable levels, a significant portion of the lower Snake River must be returned to a free-flowing condition by breaching the four lower Snake River dams, and that this action must happen soon; and
3. Substantive actions to address detrimental impacts associated with harvest management, hatchery practices, and habitat alteration will be required of all concerned people, including fishery biologists, to further increase the likelihood of recovering Snake River salmon and steelhead stocks.