

SALMON RECOVERY -- (Senate - January 25, 2006)

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Mr. CRAIG. Mr. President, today, as you may know, Jim Connaughton, chairman of the White House Council on Environmental Quality, called for a comprehensive and collaborative approach to salmon recovery in the Pacific Northwest. While I may not agree completely with Chairman Connaughton's statement, we must stop ignoring what is going on. It is about time that someone speaks out about the reality of the situation in the Northwest in regards to salmon recovery. He proposed to end outdated hatchery programs and to stop harvest levels and practices that impede recovery of salmon listed under the Endangered Species Act, ESA. He also outlined a comprehensive collaborative process to promote a shared goal and responsibility of salmon recovery. As early as next week, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's fisheries service, NOAA Fisheries, will launch a collaborative review of how harvest and hatcheries are affecting the recovery of ESA-listed salmon and steelhead.

There has been no clear direction in the past, and CEQ is taking the first step to provide a meaningful direction. We have sat back and idly watched while the region moved from injunction to injunction and lawsuit to lawsuit. In fact, over the past 2 years, two injunctions have been ordered and more lawsuits are being filed. This situation just fosters mistrust and the inability to meet common goals and objectives.

Our past practices have focused on keeping the fish in the river and in abundant numbers so that we can have our cake and eat it, too. In no other place in the world do we treat an ESA-listed species this way. We don't raise bald eagles only to use their feathers for our clothes, so why do we spend hundreds of millions of dollars--each year--to recover the species, and then allow a majority of them to be killed through harvesting? The people who pay for these absurd practices are the Northwest ratepayers.

Here are some facts that the region should know. The total cost of fish mitigation in the Northwest from 1978 to 2005 has been approximately \$7 billion. Fish costs now make up to 30 percent of the Bonneville Power Administration's power rates, 30 cents of every dollar paid for BPA-managed power. Snake River Fall Chinook are the most impacted ESA-listed species in the Columbia River system. These fish drive BPA's fish and wildlife program. Approximately 40 percent to 60 percent of this species is harvested.

Last summer, Judge Redden ordered a change in river operations that resulted in an approximately \$75 million dollar hit to the region's ratepayers. This means that depending on how many fish survive, summer spill costs between \$225,000 and \$3 million per fish, and consequently, ratepayers are left with the bill. Even at \$225,000 per fish, that is a lot of money. Judge Redden, once again, second-

guessed the region's fish managers and made the decision to increase spill this spring and summer. This will result in another cost to the ratepayers of approximately \$60 million dollars.

Management of the river by the courts is not management at all. I would like to help the management agencies--the appropriate managers of the river system--to succeed in their efforts to manage the river, in partnership with local, State, and tribal governments.

Why not trust the experts who have the scientific knowledge to make those decisions and help empower the region to work together instead of giving up and having the court systems make management decisions? How are we to succeed in the future if we keep allowing others to make our decisions for us?

When will this silliness stop? When will the region take ownership and responsibility for the river? And when will we work together as a region and get serious about salmon recovery? CEQ made the first step today.

I will work with other Members of Congress to finally face these challenges and to help provide direction and be more accountable to the public and to recovery of the species. If we are serious about recovery, we need to start acting serious and not avoid the tough questions.

I would like to challenge my colleagues to come together in a bipartisan way to help the region get back on track.

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