

***Oregon Chapter
American Fisheries Society***
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September 24, 2009

To: Oregon's Honorable Senators and Representatives

The Oregon Chapter of the American Fisheries Society (ORAFS) strongly recommends the passage of the National Fish Habitat Conservation Act (S. 1214/H. R. 2565) and request that you sign on as a co-sponsor of this important legislation and support its passage into law. We anticipate this Act will benefit and be broadly supported by diverse coalitions of professionals, businesses, agencies and the public.

This legislation, if passed, will constitute a substantial step toward the immediate conservation and eventual restoration of aquatic habitat, water quality, and native fishes of North America, which are in dire condition across the continent. The American Fisheries Society's Endangered Species Committee documented in 2008 that there has been a 92% increase in the number of imperiled freshwater fishes since similar studies were conducted in 1989. Then the number of imperiled fishes was 364; that number now stands at 700 and represents 39% of North American native fishes.

In Oregon, 48% of our 94 native fish taxa are listed as vulnerable to extinction by state or federal agencies; and, within habitats of the Puget Sound and Columbia River basins, we have already lost the following populations of Pacific salmon to extinction:

	Puget Sound	Columbia River Basin
Coho salmon	26	13
Chum salmon	22	1
Pink salmon	11	Not native
Sockeye salmon	2	11
Chinook salmon	2	33
Steelhead trout	4	14

Among the many factors responsible for the dramatic decline in native fish populations, past and continuing human alteration of freshwater and coastal habitats is the greatest threat to native fishes. Human-caused climate changes are likely to exacerbate this threat. The projected warming and altered flow regime of our streams and rivers are predicted to shrink the ranges of salmonids across our country by 20-100% (depending on the location of the population and the model assumptions). In other words, a dire

situation for native fishes and their habitats will worsen unless we take strong actions now to reverse this catastrophic trajectory and deal with the sources of the problems.

We at ORAFS, which is composed of over 400 fisheries and aquatic science professionals working toward the conservation and sustainability of Oregon fisheries and their aquatic ecosystems for long-term public benefit, believe that passage of the National Fish Habitat Conservation Act (S. 1214/H.R. 2565) will lead to the actions that are urgently needed. This legislation will establish for the first time a national plan for setting and prioritizing goals for freshwater and coastal habitat protection, restoration and enhancement. Modeled after the highly successful North American Wetlands Conservation Act, this legislation will bring a strategic, science-based, and action-oriented approach to freshwater and coastal habitat conservation and provide vital funding, and leverage other public and private resources, to support these efforts.

Native fishes are part of our national heritage and provide spiritual, ecological, and economic benefits to our citizens. We believe that the money spent on conserving and restoring fish habitat in our region will be repaid many times over through improved recreational fishing opportunities and reinvigorating the commercial fishing industry. Healthy fish habitat also provides many invaluable ecological services, including water storage, improved water quality, and habitat for many other aquatic and terrestrial species, that are usually not included in cost/benefit analyses but are important to our quality of life.

We should do everything we can to ensure that this heritage and these benefits are passed on to future generations in better condition than they are now. This bill is a step toward that goal so we respectfully urge you to support it and work to see the swift passage of the National Fish Habitat Conservation Act.

Sincerely,



Richard Grost
ORAFS President

enclosures:
selected references

cc:
Senate: Wyden, Merkley
House: Wu, Walden, Blumenauer, DeFazio, Schrader
AFS national (Hawkes, Jackson)
AFS Western Division (Roulson)
ORAFS (ExCom, Committees, and membership via website, listserve, and newsletter)

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