

Opening Statement

Endangered Salmon and Fisheries Predation Prevention Act

House Natural Resources Committee

Thank you, Chairman Lamborn, Ranking Member Huffman, Ranking Member of the full committee, Mr. Grijalva, and members of the Committee.

I appreciate the opportunity to advocate on behalf H.R. 2083, the Endangered Salmon and Fisheries Predation and Prevention Act. I am also very pleased Leland Bill is joining us here today. Mr. Bill is the Chairman of the Columbia River Inter-tribal Fish Commission and a member of the Yakama National Tribal Council, and I appreciate that he was willing and able to make the trip across the country to testify. We both agree that it's of great recreational, economic and cultural importance to ensure the recovery of salmon, a unique and important resource for our region. I am honored to have him here today.

The Endangered Salmon and Fisheries Predation Prevention Act provides tribal members and government resource managers with the means to rapidly respond and remove California sea lions from specific areas where they are posing the most harm to our salmon restoration efforts. Despite existing law, we continue to have big problems with sea lion predation on the Columbia River.

Mr. Chairman, the Columbia River makes up the entire southern border of my district. The river is a lifeline for clean, affordable energy and brings economic benefit through both recreational and commercial fishing. The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife estimates there are more than 3,500 sea lions residing in the lower end of the river. This figure is more than double 2014's record of 1,420. State studies show that between 16% and 20 % of the spring salmon run may be consumed by sea lions. This is unacceptable. While lethal take of sea lions is a last resort, it is necessary to protect the hundreds of millions of dollars in investments that Northwest residents have made to protect, restore and enhance salmon and other ESA species on the Columbia River.

And sea lions are not just a threat to salmon, but also to recreational access to the Columbia, which is of great importance to my district. Sea lions are reportedly having a devastating impact on the harbors and docks at the mouth of the Columbia, specifically with the East Marina in Astoria. Enactment of H.R. 2083 would be a start in returning the number of sea lions to a level that would minimize their damage to docks and harbors and increase access for fishermen and recreationalists. From the economic side of things alone, recreational fishing helps support more than 5,100 jobs and \$247 million in income for Washington residents.

This is not new legislation or a new problem. But the sea lion issue persists and it is only getting worse. After listening to resource managers, I've made changes to the bill to ensure the growing problem is properly addressed. My district continues to have concerns about the huge sea lion population's negative impact, from restricting access to our river and its tributaries to damaging salmon recovery – something that is especially concerning since my constituents, many of whom rely on clean, sustainable hydropower generated from the Columbia, are funding salmon restoration policies through their utility rates.

Hydro customers pay for the regional Fish and Wildlife Program through their wholesale power purchases from Bonneville Power Administration, which reports that as much as one-third of customers' utility bill is going to fish and wildlife commitments.

I want to ensure that those funds are being put to good use and that we are implementing policies based on sound-science that are not undermined by our inability to deal with this predation problem.

H.R. 2083 is a much-needed solution. The bill would amend Section 120 of the Marine Mammal Protection Act to authorize the Secretary of Commerce to issue permits to eligible entities permitting the lethal take of sea lions on the waters of the Columbia River and its tributaries as long as the sea lions are not listed as depleted under MMPA or

threatened under the ESA. Additionally, this legislation allows not only the Northwest states, but also qualified tribes to obtain permits to help protect the recovery of ESA listed salmon—something not now provided under the law. Each permit issued by the Secretary of Commerce authorizes the take of no more than 10% sea lion population per year, and it is up to the discretion of the Secretary to review and reissue a permit for an additional year. It also directs the Secretary to approve or deny an application for a permit not later than 30 days after receiving the application. This allows for states and tribes to rapidly respond to remove sea lions from areas they pose the most threat to salmon recovery.

Mr. Chairman, this bill enjoys bipartisan support both here in Congress and at home. The Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission, the Coastal Conservation Association of Oregon and Washington, the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Oregon State Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Northwest Power and Conservation Council, and public utilities are among the bill's supporters.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak, Mr. Chairman. I respectfully urge the committee to act expeditiously on H.R. 2083 to ensure we maintain access to our river, keep our commitment to tribal

obligations, and ensure a quality return on the government's investment in salmon recovery.