

Press on White House Salmon Policy Announcement 1/25/06

We Must Not Permit This

White House plan to close hatcheries reneges on a historic promise

The Daily Astorian Editorial

January 30th, 2006

The White House proposal to cut salmon fishing while closing some hatcheries is the latest vexing but predictable retreat from firm commitments the nation made to fishing communities when dams began to wreck natural salmon runs.

Hatcheries, fish ladders and other efforts to compensate for the destruction of free-flowing rivers are artificial and imperfect. We can't know for certain how salmon runs would have prospered without dams, but in nations where dams were built without hatcheries, salmon virtually ceased to exist. Hatcheries are insurance. And they've steadily improved. Hatchery practices have come a long way in terms of rearing smolts able to prosper after release.

In recent years, hatcheries have become controversial, with some observers suggesting they interfere with salmon recovery in various ways, for example by forcing naturally spawning fish to compete for scarce food and habitat with excessive numbers of genetically weaker hatchery fish. But scientific evidence is ambiguous when it comes to proving hatcheries cause systemic problems for salmon recovery.

Closing hatcheries should be approached with great caution. Much as the government might want to get out of the salmon business, salmon runs assisted by hatcheries are far preferable to salmon runs that are substantially reduced or driven into extinction.

Upriver industrial interests have long pushed for additional cuts in already sharply reduced commercial and sport salmon fishing opportunities. These industries' argument that they are being asked to shoulder too much of the burden of preserving and recovering salmon runs is highly disingenuous. They conveniently overlook the enormous sacrifices already made by fishing communities like Astoria and Ilwaco, where an economy and culture have been hammered down to virtually nothing by political choices that favor farming and power generation over fishing. We have already given up too much to be now expected to quietly give up what little is left.

Glen Spain of the Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations has it right when he says "The fundamental issue is what gives the biggest bang for the buck in salmon restoration. What the administration is doing is pointing the finger at the victims of salmon declines - that is, the fishing-dependent communities whose economy is being devastated. Hatcheries were intended to

replace habitat behind dams. If they close all the hatcheries, we want some dams down, too."

In their desperation to avoid meaningful long-term changes in Columbia-Snake River hydro operations, the White House and its allies in Congress want to break faith with the very people who have the greatest stake in salmon survival, the fishermen who both cherish and catch them.

We must not permit this.

http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/opinion/258108_salmoned.asp

Salmon Plan: Phony as a lure

Friday, February 3, 2006

SEATTLE POST-INTELLIGENCER EDITORIAL BOARD

The Bush administration's latest plan for saving salmon looks good. Beneath the surface, it's as dangerously phony as a fishing lure.

The plan emphasizes cuts in salmon catch. If combined with comprehensive habitat restoration, a fishing moratorium or something close could be a valid desperation measure. But this administration shrinks the areas deemed critical to salmon. Message: We don't care.

Apparently, the disinterest extends to river communities that would be harmed by cuts in catches that fail to restore abundant runs. As long as the administration tries to divert attention from the impact of dams, it doesn't have a plan.

Defeatism must not be an option A future without salmon is unthinkable

Tuesday, January 31, 2006

Daily Astorian Editorial

It's up to people alive today to make choices that ensure salmon survive a tidal wave of human population growth in the Pacific Northwest, from about 15 million today to 65 million by 2100.

Although it's hard to imagine any wildlife coexisting with that many people, 33 scientists, salmon policy analysts and advocates who have devoted the past three years to studying the issue think we can preserve some remnant of our region's once-great salmon runs.

William Ruckelshaus, a Washington resident who leads salmon recovery efforts and who was Environmental Protection Agency chief under presidents Nixon and Reagan, told a Portland conference last week that defeatism must not be an option. He said salmon are at the crux of the “American paradox” of people wanting a high-quality environment at the same time our behaviors make that goal more difficult to attain.

Nevertheless, by avoiding pessimism and breaking the problem into smaller, more manageable parts, Ruckelshaus and others believe salmon can remain part of our lives.

The salmon study team has come up with a variety of suggestions, some politically or practically difficult, that should at least form the basis for public discussion of these issues while we still have time to make a difference.

Possibly the hardest to swallow for those of us who live in communities that were built on a salmon economy is the recommendation that agencies give a lower priority to restoring salmon in streams that appear most likely to be hammered Northwest population explosion, rising water temperatures and other factors. Painful as this is to consider, it may indeed make sense to focus our finite resources on preserving viable salmon runs in watersheds where conditions are more favorable.

Other brainstorming ideas include creating a new Wild Salmon National Park, creating new waterways in areas unaffected by dams and actively managing wild and hatchery fish together in ways that bolster overall salmon success. As noted in *The Register-Guard* of Eugene, these ideas are bold because the threats to wild salmon are so profound that none of the current efforts will sustain the fish for another century.

“Wild salmon, by the end of the century, will be reduced to remnant runs in the lower 48 states. There will be runs along the coast, in my view, but practically speaking, in most places, they’ll be gone,” according to Bob Lackey, a senior fisheries biologist with the EPA and co-leader of the project.

This is sad and deeply troubling news to all who feel that salmon are a vital part of the spirit of the Northwest, serving also as proverbial “canaries in the coal mine” by showing the health and diversity of wide swaths of habitat. Keeping salmon a part of region is important in its own right, but it’s also true that what’s good for salmon is good for us.

A future without salmon is unthinkable. So we must start acting so they live until 2100 and beyond.

Administration Pitches New Salmon Policy

By JEFF BARNARD

Associated Press

Article published Jan 25, 2006

Conceding that using hatcheries to supplement dwindling salmon populations is harming wild salmon species in some cases, the Bush administration plans to move away from the practice in favor of a more direct solution: Catch fewer fish.

James Connaughton, chairman of the White House Council on Environmental Quality, announced the new policy Wednesday at a meeting of salmon scientists, many of whom have concluded that wild Pacific salmon will become practically extinct this century without big changes in how the harvest is managed.

"Our goal is to minimize and, where possible, eliminate the harvest of naturally spawning fish that provide the foundation for recovery," Connaughton said in an interview with The Associated Press before his speech.

Critics said the change in tactics does not address the combination of factors that have severely reduced salmon runs, from overfishing and development to hydroelectric dams.

"Hatcheries were intended to replace habitat behind dams," said Glen Spain of the Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations, which represents California commercial fishermen. "If they close all the hatcheries, we want some dams down, too."

Connaughton said the administration has a strong commitment to the hydroelectric dams, which are important to the region's economy.

Scientists have long criticized hatcheries as producers of salmon that dilute the gene pool, spread disease and compete with wild fish for food and habitat, while being less able to survive in the wild.

Connaughton did not say how much the administration wants to reduce the wild salmon harvest. He said NOAA Fisheries will review the 180 hatcheries in the Columbia Basin over the next year, shutting down those that harm salmon and helping others that contribute to recovery.

Connaughton said change will require the collaboration of regional federal regulators, Canada, Oregon, Washington and Indian tribes.

"We cannot improperly hatch and we cannot carelessly catch the wild salmon back to recovery," Connaughton said.

Since 1991, 26 populations of salmon have been listed as threatened or endangered. None has been judged healthy enough to be delisted. Restoration efforts and technological fixes to dams have run up a bill of \$6 billion over the past 10 years.

Connaughton, President Bush's top environmental adviser, outlined the new policy at the Salmon 2100 Conference, where scientists gathered to consider new ways to prevent the extinction of wild salmon.

Current salmon runs are 5 percent of historical levels, said Robert Lackey, a fisheries scientist for the Environmental Protection Agency and chairman of the conference. Wild runs disappeared from Europe, most of Asia and the Northeast as populations grew.

Lackey said Connaughton's proposals did not address the four primary drivers of wild salmon declines - a market economy that gives salmon short shrift, rapid population growth, increasing demand for clean water, and human lifestyle choices that ignore the needs of fish.

Spain, of the fishermen's group, said fishing accounts for only 5 percent of human-caused salmon deaths in the Columbia Basin, while hydroelectric dams account for 80 percent.

Bush Admin proposes hatchery closures, catch reductions

Allison A. Freeman, *Greenwire* reporter

A senior Bush administration official yesterday outlined a new policy for salmon management and recovery, with a focus on closing some fish hatcheries that could be harming wild stocks and decreasing the number of imperiled salmon that fishers catch.

White House Council on Environmental Quality Chairman James Connaughton announced the new policy yesterday at a meeting of salmon scientists in Portland, Ore. "We cannot improperly hatch, and we cannot carelessly catch our way back to salmon recovery," he said in prepared remarks.

Over the next year, the administration plans to assess its salmon hatcheries and eliminate some facilities. Officials will also propose reducing harvest levels of threatened and endangered wild salmon.

"We have in years past taken steps to reduce the amount of threatened and endangered salmon we catch, but we are still catching them at levels that warrant reassessment," Connaughton said. "This is a paradox for an administration committed to end overfishing, and we are going to resolve it."

Federal officials have included 26 populations of salmon on the endangered species list since 1991. Restoration efforts have cost billions. In a report this week on ESA expenditures, the Fish & Wildlife Service ranked chinook salmon as the costliest of all listed species, with the steelhead

just below it in second place. Two other salmon species made the top ten list. Salmon's steep recovery cost is due in large part to restrictions hydropower.

Still committed to dams, hydropower

Connaughton reaffirmed the administration commitment to hydropower and dams. Dams are vital to the Northwest's power system but critics point to them as a major factor in the fish's demise, since they reduce salmon runs.

Connaughton criticized current salmon policies that require hydropower facilities to spend millions of dollars on salmon conservation, while "we still allow ourselves the luxury of eating threatened or endangered salmon."

"Although recognize the complexity and broader equities of the matter, something seems curiously out of synch here," Connaughton said.

The National Marine Fisheries Service will launch a review next week of how harvest and hatcheries are affecting the recovery of salmon and steelhead. The review will identify hatchery programs that are impeding the recovery of salmon and areas where hatcheries could increase fish harvest without harming wild salmon recovery efforts.

The review will be modeled after the Hatchery Scientific Review Panel, a group that advanced changes in the Puget Sound salmon management.

Environmental groups have criticized the use of hatcheries, saying hatchery fish weaken wild stocks, dilute the gene pool and compete with wild fish for food and habitat. But many sport and commercial fishers [sic] support the hatcheries for adding to the pool of available fish.

Commercial and sport fishers catch millions of salmon every year in the Columbia River and off the Pacific Coast. Most of those fish come from hatcheries or fish runs that are not federally protected.

NMFS will take the lead in determining the new hatchery policy. The agency determines how many threatened or endangered salmon that fishers can take each year when fishing for more abundant salmon. State and tribal fish councils then set overall catch limits. NMFS will assess their salmon policies this year to determine if further restrictions are needed.

The announcement received mixed reviews from Congress yesterday. Sen. Mike Crapo (R-Idaho) said the hatcheries deserve review but supported them as a vital part of sport fishing.

Rep. Sam Farr (D-Calif.), chairman of the House Oceans Caucus, applauded the reassessment of hatchery fish but said fishers should not be asked to reduce their catch "while ignoring other obvious impediments to salmon reproduction."

"If the administration is serious about salmon recovery they need to put everything on the table," Farr said.

http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/localnews/2002762590_salmon26m.html

Bush plan: Cut harvests to increase wild stocks of salmon

By *Seattle Times* staff and The *Associated Press*

Thursday, January 26, 2006 - Page updated at 12:00 AM

PORTLAND — The Bush administration wants to reduce the numbers of threatened and endangered wild salmon caught by U.S. and Canadian fishermen and close some hatcheries that may be harming wild stocks.

"We cannot improperly hatch, and we cannot carelessly catch our way back to salmon recovery," said James Connaughton, chairman of the White Council on Environmental Quality, who announced the new policy Wednesday at a salmon conference.

In the Northwest, there is considerable support for redesigning — or closing — hatcheries that may weaken wild stocks. But plenty of opposition is likely to new catch restrictions that could affect sport, commercial and tribal fishermen.

The new policy comes at a time when the Bush administration is under court order to make the federal hydropower system less lethal to salmon. Connaughton said extensive work has been done to make dams safer for salmon and restore habitat.

Now, he said, it is time to focus on reducing harm to wild fish caused by salmon harvests and hatcheries.

"Our goal is to minimize, and where possible eliminate, the harvest of naturally spawning fish that provide the foundation for recovery," Connaughton said.

Connaughton said he did not want to predict how sharply sport, commercial and tribal fishing might be restricted from Alaska to the California border or what specific measures might be taken. Millions of salmon are caught annually by commercial and sport fishermen in the Columbia River and off the Pacific Coast. The vast majority are hatchery-spawned fish or from other runs that aren't federally protected.

Within U.S. waters, National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration Fisheries [sic] would take a lead role in carrying out the new harvest policy. The agency is responsible for determining each year how many threatened and endangered salmon can die as fishermen pursue more abundant runs of salmon. Those numbers are forwarded to state and tribal harvest managers, who then set overall catch limits.

Connaughton said he thought NOAA Fisheries [sic] now allows fishermen to catch too many salmon from protected runs. So federal biologists — in collaboration with state and tribal officials — will determine in coming months what further harvest restrictions are merited, according to Bob Lohn, NOAA regional fisheries administrator.

Federal officials are hopeful that the take of protected fish can be trimmed without reducing the harvest of healthier runs. This would be accomplished through the increased use of selective fishing gear, changes in harvest timing and other measures.

But there are no guarantees.

If state and tribal officials don't like the new restrictions, they could challenge them in federal court, said Jeff Koenings, director of the Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife.

Internationally, the administration would work to reduce harvests of wild salmon as part of 2008 fishing negotiations with Canada.

The administration also is calling for an independent review of 180 Columbia Basin hatcheries to determine which facilities are harming wild salmon. Those that harm protected salmon runs would be shut down or revamped.

Scientists long have blamed hatcheries for producing salmon that dilute the gene pool, spread disease and compete for food and habitat, while being less fit to survive in the wild.

Connaughton, the top environmental adviser to President Bush, outlined the new policy at the Salmon 2100 Conference, where 350 scientists from government agencies, universities, Indian tribes and conservation groups gathered to consider new ways to prevent the extinction of wild salmon.

The Salmon 2100 report, produced by 33 scientists and policy analysts, concludes that too many people using too much energy and natural resources make it inevitable that wild Pacific salmon will be reduced to remnant runs without a major change in the way people live.

Salmon runs are 5 percent of historical levels, said Robert Lackey, a fisheries scientist for the Environmental Protection Agency and chairman of the conference. Wild runs disappeared from Europe, most of Asia and the Northeast as populations grew. Human population in the Northwest and British Columbia is likely to increase from 15 million to 65 million over the next century.

Connaughton's announcement came on the same day that fishing and environmental groups announced that they will sue the administration to challenge the amount of Puget Sound chinook that fishermen are allowed to catch. Several of those groups sued in November to contest a treaty that they said allowed too many West Coast salmon to be netted in Canadian waters.

The new policy found favor with some environmentalists.

Connaughton's speech represents an important policy shift, and could help address concerns that spurred those lawsuits, said Svend Brandt-Erichsen, a Seattle attorney representing the environmental groups in both cases.

"I see this as a significant step in acknowledging the importance of addressing harvest as part of the salmon-recovery effort," he said.

But Glen Spain of the Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations, which represents California commercial fishermen, said fishing accounts for only 5 percent of human-caused salmon deaths in the Columbia Basin, while hydroelectric dams account for 80 percent.

"The fundamental issue is what gives the biggest bang for the buck in salmon restoration," Spain said. "What the administration is doing is pointing the finger at the victims of salmon declines — that is, the fishing-dependent communities whose economy is being devastated.

"Hatcheries were intended to replace habitat behind dams," Spain added. "If they close all the hatcheries, we want some dams down, too."

Jack Williams, chief scientist for Trout Unlimited and former fisheries chief for the Bureau of Land Management, said Connaughton's proposals were "clearly inadequate."

Just as NOAA Fisheries [sic] will be examining individual hatcheries, the agency should examine individual dams to determine if their economic benefits outweigh the harm they cause salmon, Williams said.

Seattle Times staff reporter Hal Bernton contributed to this report.

New salmon strategy?

By JEFF BARNARD

Associated Press writer Friday, January 27, 2006

PORTLAND, Ore. -- The Bush administration wants to put salmon restoration on a new course by reducing harvests of threatened and endangered fish by U.S. and Canadian fishermen and shutting down hatcheries that are harming wild spawners.

James Connaughton, chairman of the White House Council on Environmental Quality, announced the new policy Wednesday at a meeting of salmon scientists, many of whom have concluded that only remnant runs of wild Pacific salmon will survive unless people make major changes in the way they live.

Connaughton said extensive work has been done to restore freshwater habitat and make

hydroelectric dams less lethal, and it is time to focus on reducing the harm caused by salmon harvests and hatcheries.

"We cannot improperly hatch and we cannot carelessly catch our way back to salmon recovery," Connaughton told the scientists. "I tend toward optimism. The fact that 350 people are in this room and 150 more wanted to be here is the best condition for success."

Connaughton, the top environmental adviser to President Bush, outlined the new policy at the Salmon 2100 Conference, where 350 scientists from government agencies, universities, Indian tribes and conservation groups gathered to consider new ways to prevent the extinction of wild salmon over the coming century.

The Salmon 2100 report, produced by a group of 33 scientists and policy analysts, concludes that too many people using too much energy and natural resources make it inevitable that wild Pacific salmon will be reduced to remnant runs without a major overhaul in the way people live.

Current salmon runs are 5 percent of historical levels, said Robert Lackey, a fisheries scientist for the Environmental Protection Agency and chairman of the conference. Wild runs disappeared from Europe, most of Asia and the Northeast as populations grew. Human population in the Northwest and British Columbia is like to increase from 15 million to 65 million over the next century.

Lackey said Connaughton's proposals did not address the four primary drivers of wild salmon declines -- a market economy that gives salmon short shrift, rapid population growth, increasing demand for clean water, and human lifestyle choices that ignore the needs of fish.

Glen Spain of the Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations, which represents California commercial fishermen, said sport, commercial and tribal fishing account for only 5 percent of human-caused salmon deaths in the Columbia Basin, while hydroelectric dams account for 80 percent.

"The fundamental issue is what gives the biggest bang for the buck in salmon restoration," Spain said. "What the administration is doing is pointing the finger at the victims of salmon declines -- that is, the fishing-dependent communities whose economy is being devastated.

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Just as NOAA Fisheries [sic] will be examining individual hatcheries, the agency should examine individual dams to see if their economic benefits outweigh the harm they cause salmon, Williams said.

Connaughton said the administration has a strong commitment to the hydroelectric dams, which

contribute to the economic vitality of the region.

He added the Bush administration focus on harvest and hatcheries grew out of a commitment to end overfishing in all the nation's oceans and efforts to renew the basic fisheries law of the land, the Magnuson-Stevens Fisheries Conservation Act.

He said it was incongruous to allow people to eat endangered salmon when shrimp fisheries in the Gulf of Mexico were shut down against the possibility of killing sea turtles.

The administration would work to reduce harvests of wild salmon through the Pacific Fishery Management Council, which sets West Coast ocean salmon fishing seasons; 2008 negotiations with Canada on a treaty to regulate fishing on U.S. fish in Canadian waters; and Oregon and Washington's joint regulation of the Columbia River, he said.

"Our goal is to minimize, and where possible eliminate, the harvest of naturally spawning fish that provide the foundation for recovery," Connaughton said in an interview. "I need to underline a strong commitment to the defense of tribal trust and treaty rights to harvest fish in all the usual and accustomed places."

Connaughton said he did not want to predict how far harvest limits might go or what specific measures might be taken.

Scientists have long blamed hatcheries for producing salmon that dilute the gene pool, spread disease, and compete for food and habitat, while being less fit to survive in the wild.

Connaughton said NOAA Fisheries would be reviewing the 180 hatcheries in the Columbia Basin over the next 12 months, shutting down those that harm salmon and helping others that contribute to recovery.

<http://www.registerguard.com/news/2006/01/26/a1.salmon.0126.p1.php>

Advocates float radical ideas to save salmon

By Winston Ross

The Register-Guard

Published: Thursday, January 26, 2006

PORTLAND - Give up on streams that no longer can sustain wild salmon. Throw open the fish hatchery gates. Create a Wild Salmon National Park. Build new waterways instead of tearing down dams.

These are just a few of the conflicting, provocative and radical suggestions from a group of 33 scientists, salmon policy analysts and advocates who have been studying the future of wild salmon in the Pacific Northwest since 2002.

The volunteer participants of a project called Salmon 2100 unveiled two dozen recommendations Wednesday that they said offer groundbreaking but pragmatic ideas for keeping salmon at sustainable levels through the year 2100. The fish have been reduced to one-tenth of historic levels, despite recent gains.

The ideas are bold because the threats to wild salmon are so profound that none of the current efforts will sustain the fish for another century, the group concluded.

Four key factors will reduce salmon to a mere remnant of their historic numbers, if not drive the species toward extinction, the group said. Those threats are:

- A likely quadrupling of population in the Northwest, to an estimated 65 million by 2100.
- Increased scarcity and competition for water.
- A system of commerce that favors profits over fish protection.
- Individual lifestyle choices that ignore impacts to species such as salmon.

"We can't predict how these things are going to play out," said Bob Lackey, a senior fisheries biologist with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and co-leader of the project. "But they're not likely to change in ways that will be favorable to salmon. Wild salmon, by the end of the century, will be reduced to remnant runs in the lower 48 states. There will be runs along the coast, in my view, but practically speaking, in most places, they'll be gone."

That's why Salmon 2100's members took a novel approach: accept that current efforts won't overcome salmon's looming obstacles. Then find a way to sustain the species anyway.

Some of the project's "policy prescriptions," to be published in a book later this year, actually conflict with each other, which is fine, Lackey said. The idea isn't to look for consensus on how to save wild salmon, but to propose a number of politically and socially palatable ideas that actually could work.

Among the proposals:

- Create sanctuaries, even a Wild Salmon National Park, in areas that have the best likelihood of keeping wild salmon in good shape. Abandon other runs that won't realistically survive the century. Some argue for shifting effort to high-elevation areas that will suffer fewer impacts from climate change. Others advocate for refuges on the coast.

"I'm not saying give up on the watershed," said Jim Martin, former salmon adviser to Gov. John Kitzhaber and chief of fisheries with the state Department of Fish & Wildlife. "I'm saying don't

invest in places in direct trajectory of the growth juggernaut, and are going to get nailed by a changing climate. Invest in the areas where we still have some snowpack. ... We're going to lose salmon in these low-elevation streams; they won't be able to withstand the water temperatures."

Martin also suggested offering incentives to local governments to control growth.

- Allow hatchery fish, traditionally excluded from interbreeding with wild stocks, to be released into the general population. Conservationists have said such a move would introduce disease into the wild salmon population and weaken the gene pool. But it certainly would bolster salmon runs, proponents say.
- Build new streams. "You can build streams on old floodplains, old farmland, behind railroad dikes, highway dikes," said Ernest Brannon, distinguished research professor of the Center for Salmonid and Freshwater Species at the University of Idaho. Brannon estimated such work could be done for a cost of \$50,000 per mile.
- Convince landowners that protecting salmon can benefit them economically, and the general public to reduce its footprint on the landscape. The choices people make about where to live, what to eat and what to buy affect the environment salmon depend on for survival, some researchers said.

"The way to alter lifestyles is to change our ethical relationship with the land," said Jack Williams, chief scientist with Trout Unlimited and an adjunct professor at Southern Oregon University. "Live in a place that reduces our need to drive; think twice about purchasing a second vehicle; buy a low-emissions, low-polluting model; reduce travel; walk; eat less meat; buy organic foods from local growers; when you move, move to a smaller house or apartment; use energy-efficient appliances."

How likely such ideas are to come to fruition remains unclear.

At the last minute, the chairman of the Bush administration's Council on Environmental Policy, James Connaughton, asked to be added to Wednesday's agenda, to respond to the project's ideas. He said his attitude about the fate of wild salmon was more "Pollyanna" than doom and gloom.

"We have to reflect that we are making progress, albeit incrementally," Connaughton said. "All the runs have increased. It's important to know that runs can increase."

Connaughton also brought two new policy initiatives from the administration - a review of fishing practices and U.S. hatcheries, which could lead to tighter fishing restrictions and fewer hatcheries down the road.

But neither approach reflects the Salmon 2100 project's key premise - that minor tweaks to current approaches won't sustain salmon long-term, Lackey said after Connaughton's speech.

Still, the optimism level among the conference's attendees was high on Wednesday.

Keynote speaker William Ruckelshaus, who served as EPA chief under Presidents Nixon and Reagan, encouraged participants to believe that they can make a difference.

"Salmon recovery is right in the middle of an American paradox," said Ruckelshaus, speaking of the clash between values of people who want to protect fish and behaviors that harm them.

"You've been told to help salmon recovery by Congress and the executive branch," he said.

"When you're faced with seemingly insurmountable or intractable problems, you can either stew about them, convince yourselves that they can't be solved, or you can break them down into practical and solvable problems."

<http://www.dhonline.com/articles/2006/01/29/news/opinion/edit01.txt>

Salmon story goes on forever

January 28, 2006

The Bush administration wants to take a new approach to restoring runs of wild Pacific Northwest salmon that are threatened or endangered. It wants to quit killing them intentionally, by cutting back on the fishing harvest.

It wouldn't work, but it's logical. We don't "harvest" other creatures threatened with extinction. We don't have hunting seasons for eagles, for example. So why kill large numbers of salmon by fishing for them?

Fishing interests, of course, have a different view. They say they take only a small percentage of annual salmon runs while dams and other facts of modern life have a much bigger effect.

They may be right about the numbers, but dams kill fish unintentionally and are needed on the Columbia system for a number of powerful reasons, mainly generating power and flood control, but also navigation, recreation and water storage for agriculture. It sounds cruel to the fishing interests, but society can give up fresh-caught salmon; it can't give up electricity, and we don't want cities swamped by yearly floods.

It's unlikely, though, that cutting back on fishing will restore wild salmon in the Northwest, even combined with changes in hatchery practices as the administration also proposes. That's because, as fish scientist Bob Lackey of Corvallis and others have concluded, salmon are declining because of four major trends: a market economy that doesn't much care about wild fish, population growth, greater competition for water and people's lifestyle choices.

In the Salmon 2100 Project, scientists have proposed a range of other alternatives, most of them far out.

They range from trying to reduce the population and changing the lifestyle of the Northwest to setting up artificial streams. Among the more feasible ideas is to designate salmon sanctuaries in selected coastal river basins while essentially letting other runs fend for themselves.

One of these days another alternative may emerge. That is to quit worrying about the salmon because of the cost of trying to restore all those runs. Recovery measures in the Pacific Northwest are said to have cost \$6 billion in the last 10 years alone.

Voters may say: "We are having trouble paying for fuel and heat, not to mention housing, so why add to our cost of living, directly or indirectly, by showering money on a species of fish? Sure, the salmon is supposed to be hugely symbolic of this region, but how about we pick another icon? In an economy where the rich get richer and the rest of us struggle to get by, the fate of a bunch of wild fish is not exactly at the top of our minds."

Instead, though, we'll probably continue to muddle along, neither failing nor succeeding, but ensuring that salmon recovery stays on the agenda for the next 100 years. (hh)

<http://www.newsdata.com/fishletter/209/1story.html>

Feds Call For Less Harvest Of ESA Fish--Everywhere

A senior Bush administration official blindsided a convention of 300 wild salmon worshippers last week to announce a new initiative that will look at ways of reducing the harvest of ESA-listed salmon both in the Columbia River and the ocean between Astoria and Alaska.

James Connaughton, chair of the White House Council on Environmental Quality, addressed the Salmon 2100 Conference in Portland, where an assortment of academics, biologists and salmon recovery addicts gathered to hear different prescriptions on how to preserve and improve salmon numbers over the next 100 years, or whether it was even possible to keep them going.

But no one but Connaughton suggested cutting harvest levels. Most of the discussion was on a loftier plane and dealt with various ways that steadily increasing numbers of Northwest residents might be able to reduce their collective ecological footprints and maintain "fishable" populations of salmon.

However, the CEQ chair stayed firmly within the bounds of the 4 H's - the realms of habitat, hatchery, hydro and harvest reform. He said the feds would also scrutinize 180-odd hatchery programs in the Columbia Basin in order to close the ones that don't contribute to the recovery of wild stocks, and only maintain others if they didn't allow for large numbers of ESA-listed fish to be caught incidentally.

Noting the billions already spent on habitat and hydro improvements, Connaughton said the power system was not off the hook, but added, "we still allow ourselves the luxury of eating threatened and endangered salmon that may be needed for recovery. Although I recognize the complexity and broader equities of the matter, something still seems curiously out of synch here. These are salmon on the list of threatened species under the Endangered Species Act."

He said the current ocean harvest will be scrutinized along with latest 2005-2007 inriver harvest agreement, and when talks come up in 2008 with the Canadians over salmon treaty issues, the U.S. will push for reduced interceptions of ESA-listed stocks like the Snake River and Puget Sound chinook.

He said that maintaining the treaty tribes' fishing rights is still an unshakable premise of the feds' position and noted that the tribes have already made a significant contribution towards recovery by limiting their own harvests. "We need to make sure everyone else limits their harvest," Connaughton said.

At an informal press briefing after his presentation, the CEQ chair, along with regional NMFS administrator Bob Lohn, explained things a bit more in depth.

Lohn acknowledged the near-term problem of sorting out catches with Canada, since their biologists have already decided the coded-wire tagging program, developed many years ago to track catches, has been severely compromised by the recent U.S. effort to mass-mark hatchery fish to allow for more sport catches.

But Lohn was hopeful that a new form of sampling catches using DNA analysis similar to the Canadians' method could eventually be adopted region-wide. Lohn said the Canadians DNA work has led them to reduce harvest effort on their own weak stocks off Vancouver Island by concentrating fishing efforts both earlier and later in the fishing season when the fish are less likely to be around. But that has meant that Canadians are probably catching more U.S.-bound salmon than current models estimate, Lohn said.

And though Connaughton's presentation downplayed any possible reduction by Columbia River tribal fishers, both he and Lohn said later that if the new harvest assessments show that overall rates must be cut, then both tribal and non-tribal shares will be reduced, with the *U.S. v. Oregon* process utilized to reset allocations between the different parties in the Columbia.

They also stressed the possibility of using more selective fishing methods that might keep catches of hatchery fish relatively high while reducing impacts to listed fish.

Connaughton said all runs of listed fish have increased since 2000, with upper Columbia spring chinook up 15 percent, and Snake River fall chinook boosted to better than 300 percent. He said survival of young fish is equivalent to that of the 1960s, before the lower Snake dams were built.

However, he pointed out that about half of the Snake fall run is harvested before it gets back to Idaho, with about 60 percent caught in the ocean off Alaska, B.C., Washington and Oregon.

Canadian analyses of DNA from their recent catches shows that nearly 90 percent of the chinook caught by B.C. trollers off Vancouver Island were U.S.-bound fish, and nearly 20 percent were headed for Puget Sound. More than 40 percent were lower Columbia chinook, and almost 7 percent were made up of other threatened Columbia, Snake River and Willamette spring and fall chinook stocks.

Though some angler and conservation groups are actually suing the feds to reduce the take of listed fish, the government's biggest chore will be to get regional buy-in for their new initiatives from other large stakeholders who feel they are unfairly singled out when it comes to making sacrifices for tiny numbers of fish. In 2005, the Snake fall chinook run (hatchery and wild) made up less than 4 percent of all the 416,000 fall chinook that passed Bonneville Dam.

Sportfishing industry spokesperson Liz Hamilton said sports fishers don't want to be held to a different standard than others, and Nisqually tribal member Billy Frank Jr., representing the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission, told the Salmon 2100 crowd that if all harvesters were closed down, "you wouldn't get any more fish back."

But that's not how the federal government feels these days. CEQ chair Connaughton also told reporters that another reason new harvest and hatchery assessments are in the offing is because of "emerging" lawsuits over harvest issues.

Another one of those lawsuits emerged on the very day he spoke at Salmon 2100. The Salmon Spawning and Recovery Alliance, Washington Trout, Native Fish Society, and Clark-Skamania Flyfishers filed a notice of intent to sue NOAA Fisheries [sic] and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service over the federally-approved Puget Sound salmon harvest plan, charging that harvest rates on chinook are too high for the fish to recover.

Seattle attorney Svend Brandt-Erichsen, who is representing the groups, said the harvest plan doesn't measure up to the recovery criteria for some of Puget Sound's listed chinook populations set by the technical recovery team.

As for the feds' latest initiative to re-assess all the harvest BiOps, Brandt-Erichsen seemed pleased, even though the process is expected to take a year, and talks with Canada aren't officially scheduled until 2008. He represents many of the same plaintiffs in another lawsuit that calls for reconsultation of the BiOp that OK'd harvest levels set by the salmon treaty between the two countries. Brandt-Erichsen said the treaty allows the parties to implement additional conservation measures sooner than 2008 if a new evaluation suggests that greater harvest restrictions should be put in place. He said newer analyses have shown that there are flaws in the assumptions that govern harvest allocations between the two countries and they need to be corrected.

"We are pleased to see the harvest issue on the table with the rest of the H's," said Brandt-Erichsen. "It's part of the problem and needs to be part of the solution."

Idaho Senator Larry Craig (R) supported the Administration's initiative, though he didn't agree with everything in Connaughton's remarks. "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," Craig said in Jan. 25 remarks on the floor of the Senate. "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." -Bill Rudolph
