

## Comments for Idaho Governor's Salmon Workgroup

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### Comments

We hope the Workgroup is looking at Harmful Algae Blooms (HAB) containing Cyanobacteria as a contributing cause of declining Salmon and Steelhead populations. With headwater lakes like Henry's, Cascade, Salmon Falls, Island Park to name a few, and river transition reservoirs like Brownlee, Hells Canyon, American Falls, etc. all contaminated with HABs during spawning season.....who can blame the fish for not wanting to spawn in a bed that smell? We humans would not want to spawn in a stinky bed.

Plankton and nutrient dynamics flowing from mountain to ocean aquatic ecosystems can alter the aquatic continuum with enormous effects on fisheries. In lay terms, As Robin Williams once said, "If you put enough chemicals in the water, you'll catch two-headed bass. They're good eating once you get past the tumors".

Please consider Harmful Algae Blooms (HAB) containing Cyanobacteria as a contributing cause of declining Salmon and Steelhead populations.

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The Honorable Brad Little, Governor of Idaho  
700 W. Jefferson St. #228  
Boise, ID 83720

11/02/2020

Dear Governor Little:

I write today regarding the forthcoming recommendations from your Salmon Work Group. As an active participant with various state and federal agencies in several habitat restoration and flow enhancement projects in the Pahsimeroi River Basin, I am grateful for all the good work done on our family ranch and many neighboring ranches in the area over the past decade or so. These projects have unquestionably improved the river system for anadromous fish and for our operation. However, it's evident that despite these advances, we're only seeing minimal adults returns. As a result, entire communities are left exposed to deal with uncertainty. Millions of public and private acres in Central Idaho must still contend with the complexities of the Endangered Species Act, which impacts the economic success of rural communities up and down the Salmon River corridor and beyond. I applaud your efforts to resolve this problem via the creation of the work group, and I support the group's stated goal to recover abundant fish populations, rather than simply striving to meet minimum species recovery goals.

Every summer, I take a short fishing trip to the middle Columbia with my family. Each time, I'm staggered by the hurdles our Idaho fish face as they travel up and down the river. Predatory non-native fish, mammals and birds are abundant; warm water temperatures seem to last later each year; intense fishing pressure continues to increase; and of course there's the presence of eight dams from the ocean to the Pahsimeroi. The list is long, and I appreciate the work group taking the time to learn about many of these topics. What seems clear to me is that if we truly want abundance in Idaho, and the benefits it would bring, all of these regional issues must be addressed; and the group might even consider recommendations that would be beneficial to salmon when the fish are out to sea. Regardless, we can't fix the problem just within our state boundaries.

To this end, first I would encourage you to be bold in your discussions with lower Basin states on the issue of downriver non-tribal harvest; and on funding allocations for habitat restoration. I am impressed by the quality work done at OSC, IDFG and the host of other state/federal agencies who have far less money available to them than downriver entities. This good work is diminished when many of our Idaho-grown fish don't make it back here, due in part to aggressive downriver harvest. My personal experience is that every single salmon I've seen caught in recent years has gillnet scars, without exception.

Second, many of us would benefit from increased flexibility in water markets and instream flow programs in our state. We can see what's happened in the Klamath Basin. Let's not repeat that here in Idaho. Expanding the kind of flow programs available now in the Lemhi Basin to other Idaho watersheds would spur efficiencies in the system, put more water in the river, and more money in the accounts of irrigators.

Third, the decision-making process around salmon and steelhead recovery policy in Idaho needs to be more transparent and inclusive. Agreements that have a significant impact on fish and river communities, such as the Bonneville Accords or Idaho's position on federal hydropower management plans, are stronger when the public has a voice, and a greater range of interests can support state

action. Idaho's current process seems to occur in private, engaging just a few agency representatives named to the Idaho Salmon Recovery Team (or whatever it's called). Landowners, anglers, river community elected officials, and other Idahoans have the right to a seat at the table when it comes to fish that are so tied to our State and its people.

Fourth, predator control needs to be more actively studied and employed throughout the Columbia River drainage. I recognize that many of the predator species flourish there precisely because the system alterations suit them better than the salmon. Still, in the absence of significant action to remedy the changes in the flow regime, reducing the river populations of walleye, seals & sea lions, and various bird species would be helpful.

Lastly, and probably most importantly, fundamental changes to the hydropower system, and all the human uses that have developed alongside of it, need to be addressed via the 4-state agreement, treaty obligations, and federal action, with supporting recommendations from the work group. Now is the time for states and the tribes to collectively grasp the opportunity to re-envision places such as Lewiston or the Tri-Cities, and the river system itself. I believe landowners are doing our part in the Upper Salmon Basin to help recover fish...but the fish still aren't here more than 25 years after listing. Tweaks to the habitat program (small or large), and the temporary band-aid of predator reduction aren't going to be sufficient to get us to real abundance, in my opinion. It's time to get real about considering the removal of the four dams on the Lower Snake in Eastern Washington; while ensuring the future of all the communities that have come to depend on them in the last fifty years.

Your administration has an opportunity to ensure that the legacy of salmon and steelhead in Idaho will not only exist but thrive. Idaho is in a position to lead the region toward a more resilient future for all its citizens as well as salmon and steelhead. I'll finish with a story that I've heard here in the Pahsimeroi, one that began before I arrived. At the time of listing, the river was severely altered, and literally gone in many places. The situation was so bad that the critical habitat designation for Chinook Salmon excluded the middle and upper river because it was thought at the time that the probability of fixing those sections was essentially zero, and that the dollars could be better spent elsewhere. Some people weren't willing to accept that, and over time the work progressed up the valley, and BPA supported it. By 2017, the Pahsimeroi was reconnected to the upper 70+ miles of river, and now has perennial flow. These kinds of things can happen on a larger scale if there's the political will to do it.

Regards,

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Cc:

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