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Hatchery Reform Measures to Help Restore Washington's Salmon, Support Sustainable Fisheries

SEATTLE, WA--After two years of evaluation, an independent team of scientists working on the Hatchery Reform Project is releasing a groundbreaking report containing both area wide and site-specific recommended reforms that will change the way hatcheries are managed in the Puget Sound and coastal Washington.

The Hatchery Reform Project is a systematic and scientific redesign of Washington's Puget Sound and coastal salmon hatcheries, guided by new goals: supporting sustainable fisheries and helping to restore threatened stocks.

Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife Director Jeff Koenings and Northwest Indian Fisheries Chairman Billy Frank, Jr. were joined by Governor Gary Locke, Senator Patty Murray (D-Wash.) and Representative Norm Dicks (D-Wash.) for today's announcement of the reform measures.

"The Hatchery Reform Project is the first time anyone has taken a big-picture, systemic look at the Puget Sound and coastal hatcheries. Only a comprehensive plan like the Hatchery Reform Project can balance all of the related, complex interests, such as tribal treaty rights, sport fishing and conservation," said Representative Dicks.

Governor Locke added, "The Hatchery Reform Project is a model for natural resource management--integrating science and policy-making in a meaningful way. This is especially important for salmon recovery, and it moves us toward more coordinated and sophisticated management of hatcheries, harvest and habitat."

A nine-member Hatchery Scientific Review Group (HSRG) recommended that hatchery managers change the way they measure the success of a hatchery program, from looking at the number of salmon released to focusing on the program's contribution to conservation, harvest or other goals.

"These reforms are based on a solid, scientific framework that was reviewed by more than 200 people, including scientists, decision makers, environmentalists, sport and commercial fishers, and other stakeholders," said HSRG Chairman Lars Mobernd.

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In addition, the HSRG is recommending the following measures:

- Evaluating hatchery programs in the context of the watersheds in which they operate and the goals set for them by the managers, and taking this same regional approach to implementing reforms.
- Measuring success by the number of healthy adult salmon returning to spawn.
- Creating flexibility in hatchery design and operation so managers can respond quickly to changing circumstances and goals.
- Developing an integrated, region wide monitoring and evaluation system.
- Creating “wild steelhead management zones.”
- Using only in-basin rearing and locally adapted broodstocks at hatcheries to reduce risks and increase hatchery stock productivity.
- Conserving and recovering life-history traits of the hatchery stocks to ensure long-term sustainability.
- Capping hatchery production until there is a better understanding of which factors affect salmon survival.

The Hatchery Reform Project was recommended in 1999 when a group of leading scientists reported that systematic hatchery changes can have a major positive impact on the recovery of wild salmon in just a few years and at a relatively small cost. Adopted by Congress in 2000, the project has received bipartisan support from state and congressional leaders including Murray, Dicks, Representative Jennifer Dunn (R-Wash.) and former U.S. Senator Slade Gorton.

“By moving ahead with these reforms, the states and tribes will not only go beyond the Endangered Species Act’s requirements to minimize hatchery impacts, they intend to help us bring back the wild salmon,” said Senator Murray.

Congress also assigned Long Live the Kings, a private, nonprofit wild salmon restoration organization, to manage the project.

“We are confident that by working together we can achieve our goal of returning wild salmon stocks to abundance. Reforming hatchery practices is another step on the road to wild salmon recovery,” said Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission Chairman Billy Frank, Jr.

The reform measures in the report released today are based on the review of three of ten regions in Puget Sound and coastal Washington. The regions reviewed include the Eastern Straits, South Sound and the Stillaguamish/Snohomish Rivers. The HSRG will evaluate and release recommendations for the final seven regions in 2002 and 2003.

Copies of the HSRG report, press materials, maps of the reviewed regions and other project publications are available at www.longlivethekings.org.

For B-roll film, call Aimee Bruneau at (206) 382-9555 Ext. 21.