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4TH DISTRICT, WASHINGTON

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Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

February 19, 2008

D. Robert Lohn
Regional Administrator
National Marine Fisheries Service, Northwest Region
7600 Sand Point Way, N.E.
Seattle, WA 98115

Administrator Lohn:

I write today in strong support of the request by Washington, Oregon and Idaho for lethal removal authority of California sea lions near Bonneville Dam. Despite efforts by federal, state, and tribal officials to discourage the sea lion predation through non-lethal means, it is clear that lethal removal is necessary to help in our salmon recovery efforts. I am encouraged that the National Marine Fisheries Service recognizes the need for lethal removal in its draft environmental assessment and, with sea lions expected at Bonneville Dam again this Spring, I hope that you will grant the states lethal removal authority as soon as possible.

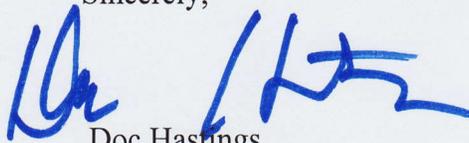
As your report makes clear, we are witnessing dramatic increases in the number of California sea lions. While these animals have always been present in the Columbia River, we have seen them appear in growing numbers in recent years – especially during the peak of the spring salmon run. As you mention in your draft environmental assessment, between 2002 and 2007, the number of sea lions observed at Bonneville Dam has more than doubled. In addition, estimates by the Army Corps of Engineers indicate that California sea lions are responsible for eating more than three percent of the run as observed at the dam. This number does not even include the numbers of salmon eaten elsewhere in the river by sea lions. Our region is working diligently to restore healthy salmon runs, and we have made great progress over the last decade. We invest hundreds of millions of dollars each year in support of salmon recovery. As we continue to spend substantial sums of money on recovery efforts, we cannot afford to take no action as sea lions feed on endangered fish year after year.

Along with my colleague Congressman Brian Baird, I have introduced legislation in the House of Representatives that provides an expedited process for the states and tribes to manage aggressive California sea lion predation of endangered salmon and steelhead in the Columbia River. Unfortunately, it is clear that the current process can take years to finalize. As you know, the application currently under consideration was submitted in 2006 by Washington, Oregon and Idaho. While this public comment period is progress

in the right direction, it is taken far too long to reach this point. In addition, regrettably, the process is not yet complete. Under my legislation, I hope that states and tribes will be able to act in a more expedited manner to respond to this crisis.

It is clear that the states meet the requirements under Section 120 of the Marine Mammal Protection Act. Since all non-lethal efforts have failed, their request for the lethal removal of California sea lions should be approved as soon as possible so that the states can begin efforts to protect salmon and steelhead in the lower Columbia River. Thank you for taking the time to review my comments. Should you have any additional questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at (202) 225-5816.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Doc Hastings', is written over the typed name.

Doc Hastings
Member of Congress