



WaterWatch opposes HB 4101

Please oppose the permanent withdrawal of up to 450,000 acre-feet annually from the Columbia River in violation of existing legal protections of Columbia River salmon.

Like its failed predecessors in the 2007 (SB 483/SB 610/HB 3525), 2009 (HB 2406), 2010 (SB 1012) and 2011 (HB 3509, SB 190) sessions, **HB 4101 would undermine or eliminate key protections for struggling Columbia River salmon and steelhead and threaten more abundant runs which support fishing families, thousands of jobs, economic activity, and food production throughout our region.**

Federal fisheries managers have set minimum needed Columbia River flows ("target flows") that federal agencies and state agencies and some irrigation districts are working to meet. Strategies include augmenting river flows in the dry season to help ensure enough water is in the river. Idaho and Montana annually release approximately 1,450,000 acre-feet of stored water to help meet these downstream target flows. Oregon has established a number of programs to help protect our Columbia and Snake River fish and the rivers upon which they depend. HB 4101 would circumvent these existing protections for imperiled salmon and steelhead by allowing new summer withdrawals from the Columbia River Basin of up to 450,000 acre feet.

What the bill does:

HB 4101 would allow up to 450,000 acre feet of water to be withdrawn from the Columbia river (or its tributaries) in the summer time and would circumvent state rules that protect imperiled salmon and steelhead. To address recognized dry season flow problems in the river and help recover endangered fish, Oregon adopted rules that limit new water withdrawals without mitigation to ensure no further diminishment of critical seasonal flows in the Columbia system (OAR 690-33, "Sensitive Stock" rules). The Sensitive Stock rules set seasonal limits (April 15 through September 30) on new water appropriations. These limits coincide in time with the Northwest Power and Conservation Council's flow augmentation schedule in the Columbia and Snake Rivers. HB 4101 would circumvent these salmon protection rules and allow up to 450,000 acre feet in new water withdrawals. These withdrawals would occur during critical summer months when federal and state agencies in the region are working together to meet target flows needed for fish.

WaterWatch of Oregon opposes HB 4101:

1. HB 4101 undermines recovery efforts to restore imperiled Columbia River fish and recover lost family-wage jobs and economic activity in both small towns and urban areas. Efforts to restore Columbia River salmon represent efforts to restore a significant portion of Oregon's economic vitality. The native fish of the Columbia River, and also the industries that depend on them, have suffered severe declines in recent decades. The Columbia River was once the largest salmon producing river system in the world. Prior to the dams, the Columbia produced in-river returns of between 10 and 16 million adults annually. Today, the Columbia produces less than 2.5 million adult fish, of which more than 90% are hatchery production. Wild chinook in the river are down to less than 2% of their historic numbers. Snake River Sockeye, Snake River fall, Snake River spring/summer chinook and now Upper Columbia steelhead are so near extinction that they are now listed under the Endangered Species Act. Wild coho runs, once numbering an estimated 1.2 million, are now officially extinct throughout most of the basin.

According to a published study by the Institute for Fisheries Resources, hydropower, habitat and dam mismanagement in the Columbia Basin has cost the region's fishery economy as much as 25,000 family-wage jobs, and \$500 million/year for each and every year these declines are allowed to continue. (Source PCFFA website)

2. HB 4101 threatens the jobs, food production, and other economic benefits provided by a healthy Columbia River. The bill fails to protect the longstanding and significant economic contribution that the commercial and recreational fishing industries provide to the Oregon economy. Recreational fishing is one of Oregon's fastest growing industries in the 21st century. Columbia River salmon and steelhead are critical to both of these industries.

Based on preliminary information of adult survival rates for early 2000s brood stock, the Columbia River Basin anadromous salmonid production will contribute about \$142 million total personal income annually to communities on the West Coast. In the Pacific Northwest, a full time equivalent job receives about \$30,000 annually. The \$109 million generated in the Pacific Northwest states of Washington, Oregon, and Idaho of personal income may support about 3,633 jobs. This economic impact can be especially significant in our region's many smaller coastal and rural communities with multi-generational fishing traditions. (Source NPCC - January 2005 document IEAB 2005-1).

3. HB 4101 undermines the collaborative efforts of a coalition of Umatilla Basin water users to appropriate available winter water from the Columbia River for the Umatilla Basin Aquifer Recovery Project. Oregon has determined that water is currently available from the Columbia River during most winter months, when Oregon's fish protection rules do not limit withdrawals. In 2008 the Legislature adopted SB 1069, which, in part, directed \$750,000 to study the feasibility of the Umatilla Basin Aquifer Recovery Project. The Governor's 2009-2011 Budget included the use of Lottery Revenue proceeds to fund this project. A broad coalition of Umatilla water users has developed the path to capture winter water in a way that will not undermine fish protections. HB 4101 would grant a free pass to Columbia River water during the summer months when withdrawals will harm imperiled fish. HB 4101 undermines the existing collaborative process.

4. HB 4101 marginalizes the economic and cultural value of healthy fisheries to Native American Tribes. Oregon cannot afford to allow new withdrawals from the Columbia to further undermine these interests.

5. HB 4101 stacks the deck against fair and balanced policy-making. The bill sets up an unbalanced task force and predetermines the outcome. The task force is directed to recommend to the state how to divide the 450,000 acre feet allocated by this bill. The make-up of the task force ensures that instream interests will always be in the minority under the rules governing the task force. The creation of a task force is used to mask the real purpose of the bill, which is to allocate additional water from the Columbia River Basin in a manner that circumvents existing fishery protection laws, harms fishing jobs and all economic activity that relies on Columbia Basin fish.

Contacts: John DeVoe, WaterWatch of Oregon (503-295-4039 x1) john@waterwatch.org
Jim Myron, WaterWatch of Oregon (503-819-5589)
Kimberley Priestley, WaterWatch of Oregon (503-295-4039, x 3)