

Richard Devlin
Chair
Oregon

Ted Ferrioli
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Guy Norman
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Northwest Power and Conservation Council

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October 26, 2020

Barry Thom, Regional Administrator
NOAA Fisheries West Coast Regional Office
1201 Northeast Lloyd Blvd.
Portland, OR 97232

Kevin Werner, Science Director
NOAA Fisheries Northwest Fisheries Science Center
2725 Montlake Blvd East
Seattle, WA 98112

Dear Regional Administrator Thom and Dr. Werner:

On behalf of the Northwest Power and Conservation Council I am writing to urge your support of stable annual funding in 2022 and beyond for research being conducted by Dr. Michelle Rub into the annual unexplained mortality of spring Chinook salmon in the Columbia River.

Dr. Rub attributes this mortality, after accounting for other possible sources, to predation by pinnipeds, including California and Steller sea lions, and harbor seals. Based on her work tagging spring Chinook in the estuary and then counting them at Bonneville Dam, she estimates that this unexplained mortality is responsible for as much as half of the run in some years. This includes several populations that are federally protected under the Endangered Species Act.

In the past, Dr. Rub's work was funded by grants through NOAA's Cooperative Research Program. That funding ended, however, as NOAA made the decision to shift those funds to other resources. Dr. Rub's funding continued through another NOAA grant program, but that grant money was delayed past the Spring 2019 tagging season by the January federal government shutdown. In 2020 her work was interrupted by the COVID 19 pandemic restrictions. The remaining grant money will be carried forward to 2022, but after that there is no guarantee of future funding.

The Council considers Dr. Rub's research critical to understanding the impacts of marine mammal predation on spring Chinook, particularly the threatened and endangered species, and should not be subject to funding through short-term grants. We strongly support guaranteed annual funding for this important research in future years. We also support expanding the research to include marine mammal predation impacts on fall-run salmon species, including coho, Chinook, and steelhead, particularly in light of the increasing presence of Steller sea lions and their predation on these other species. Please let us know how we can support more stable funding for this important research.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Richard Devlin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized initial "R".

Richard Devlin
Chair

cc:

Chris Yates, Assistant Regional Administrator
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Portland, OR 97232

Dr. Mike Ford, Conservation Biology Director
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