

SALMON ADVISORY SUBPANEL COMMENTS ON
MITCHELL ACT HATCHERY AND BUDGET REVIEW

The future of a viable salmon fishery on the Washington/Oregon Coast and inside the Columbia River depends upon many factors. These include:

- Sustaining natural salmon populations at levels where their continued survival is ensured;
- A freshwater environment conducive to nurturing juvenile salmon through the early part of their lives;
- Hatchery systems that produce salmon for harvest while minimizing detrimental impacts on natural stocks;
- Ocean conditions that maximize survival during the later part of the salmon's lives; and
- Precautionary management combined with good science and fishery monitoring;

Not all of these factors are within the realm of our control. In fact, only management is within the Council's authority. Hundreds of millions of dollars are being spent on sustaining natural production and improving the freshwater environment. Ocean survival conditions appear to be turning positive after over 20 years of poor conditions. The management process up and down the coast has been refined through ongoing upgrades in the science and cooperation among harvester groups. What is missing is a long-term, coordinated strategy for a stable, continually funded mitigation program for habitat and resource losses.

The dams on the Columbia River have provided relatively inexpensive hydroelectric power for the entire West Coast. They provided cheap power for the production of aluminum, which has bettered American lives in countless ways. They provided for irrigation systems for farming. They provided inland waterways for product transportation and recreation, but all of this came with a severe price tag: the extinction of millions of salmon.

In 1938 the Mitchell Act was enacted by Congress to mitigate for the loss of those salmon and their habitat, due to construction and operation of the Columbia River Hydropower System. Even though that mitigation came nowhere close to compensating for the loss, we were, and are, far better off than we would be without it. Unfortunately, we may be headed in the direction of being without it. Continued and increased funding of the Mitchell Act is essential to the survival of the salmon industry. The funding level, adjusted for annual inflation increases, must be high enough to include full production of salmon, adequate marking programs, comprehensive monitoring, and hatchery improvements.

The Salmon Advisory Subpanel exhorts the Council and the states to do everything within their power to provide needed information, both technical and socioeconomic, and apply political pressure on the government agencies and Congress to put Mitchell Act funding up to the levels required to maintain viable fisheries for the future.