



News From Congressman Norm Dicks

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DICKS LEGISLATION LAUNCHES COMPREHENSIVE SALMON MARKING PROGRAM

WASHINGTON, DC, Feb. 26 – The federal government has launched a new effort to protect threatened salmon stocks in the Northwest with language that U.S. Representative Norm Dicks inserted into the Interior Appropriations bill, which was passed as part of the multi-agency funding bill signed by the President last week. Dicks serves as the ranking Democratic member on the appropriations panel that funds the Interior Department.

The language of the bill states that “The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service shall, in carrying out its responsibilities to protect threatened and endangered species of salmon, implement a system of mass marking of salmonid stocks, intended for harvest, that are released from Federally operated or Federally financed hatcheries including but not limited to fish releases of coho, chinook, and steelhead species.”

Rep. Dicks’ plan allows wild fish to be visually separated from hatchery fish, facilitating recovery of wild stocks listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) by reducing negative interactions between wild and hatchery fish, while allowing selective harvest of hatchery fish. This legislation complements the hatchery reform project originally initiated by Congressman Dicks and Senator Slade Gorton.

Until now, only a portion of the salmon reared in Northwest salmon hatcheries has been marked, Representative Dicks said. “With new automated technology developed in the Pacific Northwest, however, it is now possible to increase dramatically the number of marked fish,” he said. The legislation provides funding for the purchase of portable, automated mass marking machines, as requested by the states of Washington, Oregon, and Idaho. The machines are able to process large numbers of salmon quickly, clipping each fish’s small, unused adipose fin to make it distinguishable from other fish.

“We simply must adopt new and more comprehensive strategies such as this one in order to assure viable populations of fish available for harvesting, while protecting wild fish,” Dicks said.

“The mandate for marking hatchery salmon applies to all federal hatcheries, as well as state and other hatcheries that receive federal assistance,” the Congressman said. Much of the work will be done at the state level, including the federal “Mitchell Act” hatcheries on the Columbia, operated by the States of Washington and Oregon.