

SALMON ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON
FUTURE COUNCIL MEETING AGENDA AND WORKLOAD PLANNING

Salmon Advisory Subpanel (SAS) report on pinniped predation on salmonids

The California sea lion population in the California Current has increased from less than 20 thousand when Congress authorized the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) in 1972 to approximately 300,000 today, or near their carrying capacity.

The harbor seal population has similarly increased.

This large number of pinnipeds now takes significant numbers of fish from commercial and sport trolling lines throughout the California Current and from gillnets in Puget Sound. Pinnipeds damage property in many harbors and prevent access to docks in mooring basins.

The large pinniped population is having negative consequences to threatened, endangered, or otherwise depleted salmonid populations. California sea lions that enter the Columbia River in late winter initially feed on migrating eulachon, after which they prey on spring Chinook salmon and steelhead.

Results from a 2010-2014 study by the NWFSC indicate that an increasing percent of adult upriver-destined spring Chinook disappear before arriving at Bonneville Dam. The percent disappearance rose from 10 percent in 2010 to 45 percent in 2014 while springtime peaks in the number of sea lions at the mouth of the Columbia increased from 250 to 1,500 in this same time interval.

The SAS brings this information to the Council as an introduction to the following request:

If a member of Congress requests the Pacific Council to comment on the seal and sea lion issue, the SAS would encourage the Council to send a letter of support for HR 564, the Endangered Salmon and Fisheries Predation Prevention Act that is sponsored by Congress members Kurt Schraeder of Oregon and Jaime Herrera-Beutler of Washington. The purpose of this act would be to amend the MMPA of 1972 to reduce predation on the endangered Columbia River salmon and other non-listed species and for other purposes. The SAS requests that the Council develop their letter and have it ready for submittal, should there be a Congressional request.



Upper photo: Sea lions on docks at the Astoria, OR. East mooring basin March 24, 2015

Lower photo: Harbor seals at Desdemona Sands near mouth of the Columbia River