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NW Fishletter #320, July 18, 2013

[5] Oregon Passes Bill That Paves Way For Salmon Harvest 'Reform'

Just before adjourning, the Oregon Legislature passed Senate Bill 830, which will implement Gov. John Kitzhaber's plan to remove commercial gillnetters from the mainstem Columbia and reallocate more ESA-listed stock impacts to the recreational sector.

The measure passed the Senate on July 7 and the House on July 8.

The new regime will not change the overall impacts to ESA-listed stocks from non-Indian harvest groups, which is set by the *U.S. v. Oregon* process. Some supporters of the reform effort, including the governor, had claimed the new regime would reduce impacts on wild fish.

The Oregon reform effort also calls for allowing gillnetters to keep fishing in select areas outside the mainstem, and boosting netpen-raised salmon numbers for their harvest. A \$500,000 fund has also been established to mitigate economic harm to gillnetters from the transition.

Among other things, the bill legalizes the use of selective gear like purse seines, previously outlawed. A contested Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife economic analysis claims that gillnetters can switch to seines in the mainstem and catch more fall Chinook to make up for lower spring harvests, when prices are high for high-quality salmon. The gillnetters say catching more low-value fall Chinook doesn't pencil out, especially after investing tens of thousands of dollars for new gear.

"For years, the commission and legislature failed to act to implement harvest reform on the lower Columbia River," said Liz Hamilton, executive director of the Northwest Sportfishing Industry, in a July 8 statement. "Kudos to Gov. Kitzhaber. He realized that there is a way to maximize the economic and social benefits of our salmon runs, and worked with both sides of the aisle, his commission and the state of Washington to make it happen."

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The new law also establishes an exclusion zone in Youngs Bay near Astoria, to keep recreational fishers from hooking salmon on their way to the largest so-called select area used by the gillnet fleet, who have previously argued the area is much too small for the fleet to fish at the same time.

Meanwhile, a lawsuit by gillnetters to stop implementation of the plan is still in the Oregon State Court of Appeals. The netters have argued that the state's economic analysis was flawed, and the plan was illegal because it called for the use of seines.

The 60-year-old ban on seines will be lifted as soon as the governor signs the bill, which is expected any time. **-B. R.**

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