



HASTINGS' 'FISHERIES PREDATION PREVENTION ACT' WOULD ALLOW PERMITS FOR LETHAL SEA LION REMOVAL

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U.S. Rep. Doc Hastings, R-Washington, last week reintroduced bipartisan legislation aimed at allowing Northwest states and tribes to obtain permits for lethal removal of the most aggressive California sea lions in order to deter predation on salmon as they return to the Columbia River to spawn.

The proposed legislation, the Endangered Salmon and Fisheries Predation Prevention Act, is co-sponsored by Republican Reps. Greg Walden of Oregon, Michael K. Simpson of Idaho and Jaime Herrera Beutler of Washington and Democratic Rep. Kurt Schrader of Oregon.

The bill was referred to the House Committee on Natural Resources, which Hastings chairs.

“For years now, Northwest ratepayers have paid hundreds of millions of dollars every year on measures to protect endangered salmon migrating through our Columbia River dams, only to see a growing number fall prey to aggressive sea lions that camp out at the base of the Bonneville Dam and other places,” said Hastings. “I am pleased to once again introduce this bipartisan legislation to ensure that, despite endless litigation, federal and Northwest state agencies will be permitted to work with local tribes using all available methods, including lethal removal of the most aggressive of these predators, to protect this important resource.”

Hastings' bill, which is identical to legislation he introduced last Congress that passed the House of Representatives in June 2012 by a bipartisan vote of 232 to 188, but the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee failed to hear the bill. If passed it would allow for the issuance of state and tribal permits to lethally remove sea lions that consume salmon and other fish species in the Columbia River and its tributaries.

Those fish species include 13 salmon and steelhead stocks that are listed under the Endangered Species Act. The killing of sea lions is prohibited, for the most part, by the Marine Mammal Protection Act. Steller sea lions are also protected under the ESA.

The proposed legislation would allow more expedited approvals of lethal removal authority now regulated by Section 120 of the MMPA of 1972 and expand the list of entities that could be granted such authority.

The proposal mandates that the Secretary of Commerce would approve or deny an application for a permit within 30 days of receiving application. Approvals would be effective for up to one year and allow the lethal taking of up to 10 sea lions.

“Eligible” entities would include the states of Idaho, Oregon and Washington, the Nez Perce, Umatilla, Warm Springs and Yakama tribes, and the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission.

Hastings says that in recent years sea lions have been entering the lower 205 miles of the Columbia River, and congregating each spring around Bonneville Dam, to feast on fish on fish.

According to previous state court filings, during winter and spring months, as many as 1,000 California sea lions can be in the lower Columbia River, each of which consumes 15 to 30 pounds of fish per day, the congressman says.

Scientific task forces have been convened for several years and have concluded that non-lethal removal have not been effective, according to a Hastings press release.

The bill only addresses sea lions that are not listed under the ESA.

Last year, following another round of scientific determinations by technical review teams, NOAA Fisheries, under Section 120, authorized the states of Washington, Oregon and Idaho to permanently remove California sea lions through the 2016 spring season.

Under Section 120 as it now exists, gaining lethal removal authority takes several months at minimum, and is only available to the states.

