

Pacific Region
Chris Beggs, Watershed Enhancement Manager
Puntledge Hatchery
Fisheries & Oceans Canada
Box 3111, Courtenay, BC
V9N 5N3

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Date June 11, 2007

Dr. Tom Karier, Chair, and Members
Northwest Power and Conservation Council
851 SW 6th Avenue, Suite 1100
Portland, OR 97204-1348
USA

Dear Dr. Karier, Chair, and members of the Northwest Power and Conservation Council:

Please accept this letter in support of Smith Root and the work they are doing in relation to problem marine mammals and their predation on threatened salmon stocks of the Pacific Northwest.

I am the Watershed Enhancement Manager of the Puntledge River Watershed on the east coast of Vancouver Island, B.C. My work here includes the conservation and rebuilding of a number of salmon stocks within the Puntledge watershed and in particular, a summer run of chinook, which is a genetically unique stock of the east coast Vancouver Island. We have a number of issues impacting the salmon in our watershed including: 2 dams, logging, mining, urbanization, high water temperatures, and on top of all of these, seal predation. We have been working diligently to address the above habitat issues, but as you are probably aware, this takes time. In the mid 90's, the seal predation was identified as a major threat to the summer chinook stock, as at that time, they were taking up to 25% of the smolts migrating out of the river and then 35% of the adults returning to the river. (Research by DFO PBS) Over the next 2 years, we tried a variety of non lethal actions to try to prevent the high rate of predation by harbour seals on our summer run chinook. None of the methods proved effective and in 1997 / 98 we culled 52 animals. For the next 5 years, seals were not an issue. Over the last 5 years, the population of animals feeding in the river has grown again to pre cull levels. We are still looking for a non lethal way to deal with the seals but will probably have to cull the population once again or we may lose all of the gains we have made in rebuilding the summer chinook stock over the last 10 years. This year, I was approached by the Pacific Salmon Commission to partner with them on a study with Smith Root and the effects of an electrical deterrent device designed to protect fish from feeding seals. Initial trials were carried out at the Vancouver Aquarium on captive seals. That work proved promising and the device was then brought to Courtenay where we set the apparatus up in the Courtenay River (lower end of the Puntledge River) to test it out in an open river with naturally migrating fish with wild seals predated on them. The results from these trials showed promise in excluding the seals from established predation areas and in keeping seals from migrating upstream in rivers. Smith Root were very professional and worked in a very cautious and conscientious manner to ensure that the seals were impacted to the point of wanting to move from their feeding areas but were not injured. I think that this study has potential in the future and think that

further trials should be undertaken to develop the device for controlling predation by marine mammals on fish stocks that are of a significant concern.

Yours sincerely,



Chris Beggs,
Watershed Enhancement Manager,
Puntledge Hatchery

Cc: Carl Burger, Senior Scientist, Smith-Root, Inc