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Scientists Release New Recommendations for Reforming Puget Sound/Coastal Washington Hatchery System

OLYMPIA, Wash.—The Hatchery Scientific Review Group (HSRG) released a report today that lays the groundwork for implementing a comprehensive, systematic and scientific redesign of salmon hatcheries in Puget Sound and coastal Washington. By focusing on watershed conservation and fisheries goals, scientific defensibility and adaptive management, the recommendations redefine how hatchery programs will be designed, operated and evaluated.

Members of the HSRG were joined by Washington Governor Gary Locke, U.S. Representative Norm Dicks (D-Wash.), Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission Chair Billy Frank, Jr., NOAA Fisheries Regional Administrator Bob Lohn and Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife Director Jeff Koenings for today's announcement.

"Hatcheries should be viewed as only one of several tools available for recovering depressed populations and providing fisheries," said HSRG Chair Lars Mobrand, Ph.D. "They should be used for these purposes only when the benefits outweigh the risks."

He added that the keys to successful hatchery reform include operating hatchery programs based on clear regional goals and institutionalizing a process of continued monitoring and assessment that informs decision-making.

The state, tribal and federal fish management agencies have asked the HSRG to remain empanelled beyond the recommendations phase to help design the mechanisms necessary to implement the recommendations and establish adaptive management techniques.

"With a vision of how hatcheries can be managed more effectively in the future, and a comprehensive strategic plan that is based on solid science, we believe the benefits of hatchery reform in western Washington will be far reaching," said Billy Frank Jr., chairman of the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission.

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“My agency has the dual responsibilities of conserving wild salmon and supporting sustainable fisheries,” said Jeff Koenings, Ph.D., Director of the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, in support of the project. “Hatcheries play a critical role in both arenas, and the HSRG is providing the scientific framework for their operation.”

The HSRG divided Puget Sound and the coast into 10 regions, providing an unprecedented opportunity to make region-by-region recommendations based on regional management goals for conservation and harvest, and on stock and habitat health.

The three regions included in the March 2003 report are the Skagit River Basin, Nooksack/Samish Rivers and Central Puget Sound. The HSRG released its recommendations for the Eastern Straits of Juan de Fuca, South Puget Sound and the Stillaguamish/Snohomish Rivers in February 2002. The final four regions—Hood Canal, Willapa Bay, North Coast and Grays Harbor—will be reviewed by the end of 2003.

The reviews were conducted via in-region meetings and supported by a collaborative information gathering process among management agencies and the scientists. The reviews included a consideration of each hatchery program’s effects on all hatchery and naturally spawning salmonid stocks in the region.

U.S. Representative Norm Dicks and Washington Governor Gary Locke have taken the lead to secure funding for both the recommendations and implementation phases of the Hatchery Reform Project. “Salmon fishing provides \$1 billion annually to our state’s economy,” said Congressman Dicks. “One of the things I admire most about this effort is that it seeks to make our fisheries sustainable while protecting and helping to recover wild salmon.”

**Copies of the HSRG report, press materials, maps of the reviewed regions and other project publications are available at www.longlivethekings.org.
For B-roll film, call Aimee Bruneau at (206) 382-9555 Ext. 21.**

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