

A Call to Request Emergency Board Funds to Aid the “Human Steelhead Ecosystem”

Good morning, Chair Wahl, Members of the Commission and Director Melcher.

I have spoken before this committee several times in recent months to urge protection for wild summer steelhead. Returns in the Columbia-Snake Basin are at all-time lows. The famed North Umpqua experienced similar low returns. ODFW has responded by closing many – though not all – rivers to all steelhead fishing and in some cases, all sport fishing.

The Conservation Angler supports these efforts – and in fact – we believe there is still more to be accomplished. Wild Steelhead are dying the death of a thousand cuts. Every action that we can control to positively impact spawning returns – commercial and sport fishing closures, revised hatchery practices, fish-friendly water release protocols, among others -- must be taken to save our wild steelhead so there are fish for future generations.

But today I wanted to focus on the hardships faced by people whose livelihoods have been affected by recreational angling closures on rivers like the Deschutes, the John Day, and the North Umpqua. These people comprise what I would describe as the human steelhead ecosystem. They run small businesses in towns like Maupin, Madras, The Dalles, Glide, and Condon including:

- Fishing guides, and their staff
- Flyfishing and gear fishing shops and their staff
- Home grown Fishing Gear manufacturers
- Shuttle drivers
- Motel owners
- Restaurant and market deli owners and their staff

The short-term impact of fishing closures – which are essential for the long-term well-being of Oregon’s wild steelhead – is being unduly borne by these small business owners.

The good news is that the potential for relief is within our control. The Legislative Emergency Board has \$500 million of unallocated and unburdened funds available for to assist Oregonians of all backgrounds – particularly in situations like this. A disaster declaration by Governor Brown – and the marshalling of a discreet, and quantifiable affected economic sector – could begin to provide a modicum of much needed relief.

Today, I urge the OR F&W Commission to draft a Letter to Governor Brown urging her to declare the 2021 collapse of summer steelhead runs as fishing sector disaster. This would begin the process of identifying the affected communities, quantifying the losses, and establishing criteria for eligibility for available funds. The Conservation Angler has drafted and will submit an action plan for the responsible entities to follow in establishing this modicum of economic relief critically deserved and desperately needed. I look forward to additional discussion on this crucial matter and I greatly appreciate the opportunity to speak to you during the Public Forum.