Columbia River Salmon Recovery
A Comprehensive and Collaborative Management Strategy

Remarks as Written:
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Introduction

I am very pleased to be back in the Pacific Northwest to discuss our shared commitment to salmon recovery. [Acknowledgements].

I am here in two capacities. First, for nearly five years, I have led the effort to coordinate the interagency salmon policy team, made up of senior officials in Washington and the Regional Executives.

Second, one year ago, President Bush issued an executive order creating a Cabinet Level Committee on Ocean Policy, which I chair. The Committee is charged with implementing the President's Ocean Action Plan in response to key recommendations from the U.S. Ocean Commission. One of our top priorities is to end overfishing and rebuild fish stocks nationwide. Salmon certainly figure prominently.

For some time now, the states of Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and Montana, the federal government, tribal groups and many other interested parties have labored to protect salmon stock while producing clean/low-cost hydro electricity. Northwest ratepayers and federal taxpayers have invested billions of dollars toward restoring habitat and improving hydropower structures and operations.

While the challenges associated with salmon recovery are daunting, we know we can make real progress. In the mid-1980s, the Northwest Power Planning and Conservation Council established a goal of doubling the salmon runs. The dramatic increases in returning adults in recent years are a result, at least in part, of the community and multi-party actions taken in response to that call to action. In addition, numerous public and private activities have been evaluated and designed to meet the Endangered Species Act requirement that they *avoid extinction* of listed wild salmon in the Columbia River. Our focus, however, is appropriately shifting, as it must, toward the greater aspiration of the Endangered Species Act, which encourages us to *achieve recovery* of wild salmon in the Columbia River.

That is why today I am announcing two important, new objectives for advancing the recovery effort: ending outdated hatchery programs and stopping harvest levels and practices that impede recovery of wild, endangered and threatened salmon. The reason is simple. We cannot improperly hatch, and we cannot carelessly catch, the wild salmon back to recovery. To achieve these objectives, we will employ a comprehensive and collaborative process that will add to our investments in habitat restoration and hydropower operations, including our recently enhanced collaboration for the Federal Columbia River Power System.

Our history of initial progress demonstrates that, with clear goals and focused efforts across all elements of the salmon's life-cycle, we can create a legacy of wild salmon recovery for future generations. Our shared goal requires our shared responsibility.

4 Hs: Habitat, Hydro, Hatchery, Harvest

Before discussing specific aspects of these two goals, I would first like to put them in context. On August 22, 2003, I had the great privilege of accompanying President Bush to the Columbia River to see firsthand the two powerful icons of the Pacific Northwest -- its mighty hydropower system and its magnificent salmon. In his remarks at Ice Harbor Dam that day, the President stated his commitment that:

> . . . a flourishing salmon population is a vital part of the vibrancy of this incredibly beautiful part of our country. And I appreciate the commitment that we are making as a country, and that you're making as a community, for salmon restoration.

The "All-H" management approach was established in July 2000 as the conceptual centerpiece of salmon restoration: habitat, hydro, hatchery, and harvest. These are the manageable elements which essentially embody an ecosystem approach to salmon recovery – a concept resoundingly endorsed by the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy, the Pew Commission on Ocean Policy, the Administration's U.S. Ocean Action Plan, and innumerable other public and private sources.

Notwithstanding this broadly shared view, during much of the last decade, our governments, private parties and groups, and the media have largely focused on an extended, piecemeal series of complex legal and technical skirmishes concerning "biological opinions." These processes evaluate whether particular government and private-sector activities will put the salmon in "jeopardy" of extinction. This is a relatively narrow technical and legal inquiry. Yet, parties routinely and understandably struggle in each of these individual situations to morph the process into something more – to try to use the specific situation to accomplish broader recovery objectives, including through policies and actions over which particular actors have limited or no control.

The more recent biological opinions of power systems explicitly discussed their inherent shortcomings when it comes to the recovery side of the ledger, and acknowledged the need for a more comprehensive, All-H approach. This need, and the struggle over how to address it, is at the forefront of discussions in the context of the FCRPS collaboration. It is time to press ahead and find a way to more effectively put all of the H's to work in the context of a better integrated, instead of ad hoc and piecemeal, approach.

We Must Continue Our Strong Investment in Hydro and Habitat

Through the costly and complex work on hydropower and habitat, improvements are well underway and will continue. Among the many technological and operational successes, the huge innovation and investment in spillway weirs deserves particular praise. As to habitat, significant federal and matching state dollars are being deployed by state and tribal co-manager agencies, the Northwest Power and Conservation Council's Fish and Wildlife Program, and community-based groups who are delivering on-the-ground conservation results. An unheralded, and critically important development, is the nearly complete process of establishing detailed basin recovery plans. These plans will provide a much stronger foundation for setting priorities and reasonable schedules for action.

The last 5 years of complete data (2000-2004) show that our efforts are paying off. All runs of listed fish have increased – all of them. Some have increased modest amounts. For example, upper Columbia spring chinook is up 15% from 2000 to 2003. Other runs have increased dramatically: Snake River fall chinook, a key stock including both wild and hatchery fish, has increased 305%. Lower

Columbia chum has exploded 690% and those are all wild fish. Survival of young fish is now equivalent to what it was in the 1960s, before the lower Snake River dams were built. These numbers are evidence that we can and will succeed in salmon recovery.

This work on hydro and habitat has cost a lot of money. We have collectively spent billions. No matter how you calculate, we are spending a lot of money per fish. I wish to make very clear, however, that my message today is not that hydropower system has met its obligations to salmon and is now off the hook. The hydropower system has made significant improvements. These improvements will need to be sustained and enhanced as part of an overall recovery strategy if we are to be successful.

We Must Dramatically Improve our Harvest Levels

Almost in spite of our investments in habitat and hydropower, we still allow ourselves the luxury of eating threatened and endangered salmon that may be needed for recovery. Although I recognize the complexity and broader equities of the matter, something still seems curiously out of synch here. These are salmon on the list of Threatened Species under the Endangered Species Act.

This is the same ESA that:

- shuts down a timber sale because it *might* not leave enough trees for owl nests
- shuts off water to an irrigation canal because it *might* trap a fish
- regulates shrimp fisheries to reduce *accidental* capture of turtles
- and delays or redesigns numerous projects that *will* harm or harass a listed species.

However in the Columbia River, the Snake River Fall Chinook gives about half of its returning adult population to us. Most of the fish taken (60% of the total) are taken in the ocean – from as far away as southeastern Alaska and Canada to the coastal waters of Oregon, Washington. The rest are taken in the Columbia River for tribal uses and by other fishermen.

If it makes sense to spend $75 million in additional spill from the hydro system to create the prospect of survival of a handful of returning adult Snake River chinook, then we need to be equally diligent about examining the prospect of additional benefits with respect to harvest limits and harvest practices.

We have in years past taken steps to reduce the amount of threatened and endangered salmon we catch, but we are still catching them at levels that warrant reassessment. This is a paradox for an administration committed to end overfishing, and we are going to resolve it.

I am not the only person to raise this question. I appreciate the bipartisan work of Congressmen Norm Dicks, Greg Walden, and Brian Baird who initiated public meetings on this tough issue last fall. Even some fishermen have raised this question themselves. It is clear that harvest needs to be scrutinized more closely.

So here is what we intend to do. We will initiate efforts to reduce the overall allowable harvest level of threatened and endangered wild salmon through the various processes by which harvest levels are set.

Over the next 12 months, we will propose a reduction in harvest levels and work with the states of Oregon, Washington, and Idaho, the Treaty Tribes, and Canada to find the most appropriate ways to sensibly and effectively tackle this challenge. Our goal should be to minimize and, where possible,

eliminate harvests of naturally spawning fish, which provide the foundation for salmon recovery. It is the right thing to do.

Our renewed scrutiny of wild salmon harvest will include immediately moving to modify existing agreements for ocean harvest and for the 2005-2007 Columbia River harvest agreement.

We will review and improve fishing technology and practices so they are more selective. We will maintain and expand data collection fundamental to managing harvest levels, fish passage, and other vital dynamics of salmon conservation. We will also tighten our standards of protection for threatened or endangered wild salmon to reduce or eliminate their catch in comparison to the overall allowable harvest and beginning now we will re-evaluate the international dynamics of harvest to establish a strong U.S. conservation position for the 2008 Pacific Salmon Treaty talks with Canada.

Our responsibility, commitment and defense of tribes' trust and treaty right to harvest fish at "all usual and accustomed places" is an unshakable premise of our position. Tribes already make a significant contribution towards recovery by limiting their own harvest. We need to be sure everyone else limits their harvest.

We Must Transform our Hatchery System for Recovery

We justify the harvest of so many fish, in part, by producing large quantities of fish in hatcheries. Over 180 hatchery programs operate in the Columbia River Basin alone. Currently, our primary reason for having hatcheries is to support harvest – not to support recovery.

If we are committed to hundreds of millions of dollars for habitat, even knowing that the returns are years out and hard to measure, then we should work more aggressively to improve hatcheries to produce measurable results.

We need to ensure that our hatchery facilities are up to date and use our best knowledge about purpose, design, and operations in the complexity and interdependence of natural forces. We need to mimic natural production and selection processes, not harm them.

Because outdated hatcheries can put maladapted fish in the water, we must be cautious, and not guided by an unnatural guarantee that most eggs will become viable fish. On the other hand, we continue to believe that proper use of local broodstock in supplementation hatcheries can be valuable in restoring certain runs.

We have enough evidence on hand to know that hatchery programs need to be transformed. What we began decades ago as a crutch for our harvest demand must become a vital aid in our determination for recovery.

Harvesting fish outside the Columbia basin and in the mainstream are reasonable goals, but the goal of recovery must necessarily and properly precede them.

So here is what we are going to do. Over the next 12 months, we will prepare a list of hatchery programs funded or approved by the federal government that are impeding recovery of salmon. We will begin the elimination of hatchery programs that clearly are impeding recovery of salmon.

In some situations, the decision should be relatively easy and very prompt. For example, the Fish and Wildlife Service is now phasing out the spring Chinook program at the Winthrop National Fish

Hatchery in the Upper Columbia River and transitioning it from a non-native hatchery stock to a new, native broodstock. Other decisions will require more extensive review and consultation. As we cut support for problem hatcheries, we will look for opportunities to reallocate funds to reform existing hatchery programs, so that they help contribute to recovery, and to continue our support for existing programs that are doing the job already – such as the Nez Perce Tribal hatchery in Idaho.

Beginning next week, NOAA Fisheries will launch a collaborative review of how harvest and hatcheries – particularly federally funded hatcheries -- are affecting the recovery of ESA-listed salmon and steelhead. This review will be open, thorough, and independent, using a highly-respected non-federal facilitator. It will identify not only where hatchery programs are impeding the recovery of salmon, but also where there are opportunities to intelligently employ hatcheries to increase harvest without impeding recovery. Our model for this collaborative review will be the Hatchery Scientific Review Panel, which advanced major reforms in Puget Sound. This effort, and its extension to the Columbia Basin, continues to have strong bipartisan support in Congress.

We will work with the states and other non-federal entities to encourage them to do the same with hatcheries they fund. As we pursue our goal of ending hatchery programs that impede recovery, we will be working within the context of the numerous hatchery and harvest programs and agreements that are the product of negotiations in U.S. v. Oregon. In addition, our work will come to fruition through familiar public decision-making processes under NEPA, Pacific Fishery Management Council, hatchery programs, and the 2005-2007 Non-Indian and Treaty Indian fishery management agreement.

We recognize that the current harvest regime and hatchery production are closely interlinked. We tend to harvest what we produce, and, today, over two-thirds of the fish returning to the Columbia are the result of artificial, production hatcheries. If we are going to preserve and restore the remaining wild, naturally-producing salmon runs in the Columbia, we need to make sure that the fish we are producing in hatcheries either are helping to rebuild these natural runs or can be harvested in places and at times where the harvest has minimal impact on the natural runs.

We Must Collaboratively Take Action on our Shared Goals

Salmon recovery is our shared goal. All those who share this goal must also share responsibility for promoting recovery through actions aimed at all aspects affecting the salmon's lifecycle that we can control. The Administration is committed to collaborate with the region aggressively, persistently, and most important, constructively.

Right now, and for the first time, a serious effort is underway to better define a more comprehensive approach to recovery for Columbia Basin salmon through a collaborative effort of federal agencies, states, tribes, and local communities. I wholeheartedly and enthusiastically endorse this process. If anything, it may require expansion.

If agreements cannot be forged through this process, the federal government is nonetheless obligated to proceed with the decisionmaking entrusted to its discretion under the law. We vastly prefer, however, that the way forward be the product of agreement and commitment of all parties – such outcomes produce the most sustainable solutions. This is hard work and decisions are needed quickly. I urge all participants to own this process, so that together we may own its success.