



WESTERN WASHINGTON AG REPORT

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LET US BE CLEAR

Addressing the recent Earthjustice & Swinomish Tribe intent to sue the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for Endangered Species Act violations

For more than 11 years, the Skagit Delta Tidegates and Fish Initiative (TFI) Implementation Agreement has been in place to facilitate and balance tidegate maintenance and estuary restoration. The original participants in the negotiations included the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA-NMFS), Western Washington Agricultural Association (WWAA), and 12 Skagit County drainage, irrigation, and diking districts. Underpinning the TFI Implementation Agreement, is the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) developed between the WWAA, NOAA, and WDFW. WWAA has representation on the Oversight Committee of the TFI. WWAA's executive director, Brandon Roozen, also serves as the Credit Administrator of the agreement.

The TFI has moved forward more

than 800 acres of restoration, and improved about a dozen tidegates in the delta. These actions have been taken on the premise of goodwill and partnership with the landowners and community. Without the TFI, infrastructure maintenance would not be moving forward as smoothly and positively as it has been for the past decade.

In early September, WWAA was made aware of Earthjustice's notice of intent to sue the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) on behalf of the Swinomish Indian Tribal Community. In the notice, Earthjustice asserted that the Corps has violated the Endangered Species Act (ESA) Sections 7 and 9 consultations in issuing tidegate authorizations through implementation of TFI protocols and processes. They assert that the Corps and NOAA-NMFS must reinstate consultation under the ESA Section 7 Biological Opinion.

WWAA is adamantly opposed to

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reinitiating consultation as asserted in the notice because, while compelling, their argument is based on inaccurate and incomplete data and assumptions. They incorrectly assert that it has been more than four years since any new TFI habitat credits have been generated. They also incorrectly assert that both the Oversight Committee and Credit Administrator have significantly reinterpreted the TFI agreement.

"They also make other inaccurate

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WWAA MISSION

To represent agriculture by providing services to the entire agricultural community

WWAA COMMITMENTS

Engage in internal and external (economic, environmental, regulatory) pressures on agriculture

Interact with county, state, and federal legislators and regulators

Pest and nutrient management control

Network with and support of the agricultural research community

Seek out and develop opportunities and technologies for agriculture

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claims and selectively utilize data to avoid the comprehensive and overall positive progress that the TFI has made for both habitat restoration and tide-gate management," said Roozen of WWAA.

It is important for WWAA to be publicly clear on two key points. First, WWAA is a signatory to the TFI, therefore, we are committed to seeing it through, including restoration.

And secondly, there have been NO recorded instances of fish take (or fish deaths) as a result of tidegate repairs or maintenance in the TFI's lifetime.

"In recent years, we have witnessed a change in philosophy, tone, and trust with our partners at the Swinomish Indian Tribal Community regarding Chinook recovery," said Roozen. "While we are committed to fulfilling our duties to Chinook recovery, we are concerned with the new direction and aggressive behavior from the Swinomish. We continue to participate in the TFI process, and uphold the agreement as it was intended and agreed on."

WWAA will continue to move forward with actions on behalf of farmers in the delta, and defend its work within the TFI if a suit is filed. Should the Corps and NOAA decide to open up the TFI to a new consultation process, WWAA will consider its own options as a signatory party on behalf of our area's farmers.



Adult male Chinook salmon ready for spawning. Photo courtesy of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

WATER SUPPLY: WE ARE NOT LEAVING THE TABLE

All across the West, water supply has been a topic of heated discussion this year. From the Klamath Basin of Oregon to Whatcom County and the Nooksack River, water supply management is at the forefront of our farmers' minds. Getting irrigation water during critical times of plant growth isn't as easy as just turning on the spigot in Skagit County and surrounding areas. In our region, this need is balanced with maintaining healthy water levels and temperatures. There have been many discussions and meetings to chart the best possible path forward for farmers, fish, and flood control.

This summer, WWAA has been working with partner organizations and agencies to develop sound water management protocols. WWAA continues to bring the voice of the region's farmers to the table, advocating for methods and procedures that have worked historically and benefit agriculture. We have advocated for the continued use of the Comprehensive Irrigation District Management Plan (CIDMP), which provides a voluntary, locally driven, incentive-based process by which the agricultural community can improve their operations and water management techniques in response to Endangered Species Act (ESA) and Clean Water Act (CWA) concerns. The CIDMP process was modeled after the state's Watershed Management Plans. The goal of the CIDMP is to allow the agricultural community flexibility to address the

ESA and CWA while preserving the key processes and functions that are necessary to sustain commercial agriculture in a rapidly urbanizing landscape.

While there is pressure to utilize other models, WWAA continues to stay at the table and advocate for the continued use of the CIDMP and the best interests of area farmers. Our message is simple: policy cannot only use best available science, it must also eliminate impacts to agriculture.

CHINOOK: THERE'S MORE TO THE STORY

Illegal fishing nets abound, ocean pastures are toxic, and Chinook salmon numbers are down all across the West Coast. According to a recent, peer-reviewed study by Dr. David Welch and his team from Kintama Research Services Ltd in British Columbia, Canada, Chinook salmon declines "are similar from California to Alaska – and most of these river basins have no dams. Our analysis of all the available data shows that survival everywhere is low – and has fallen by three-fold, or 65%, across the board over the last 50 years," says Dr Welch.

According to Dr. Welch, the Chinook decline is not solely due to dams, dikes, or other inland habitat. In fact, researchers believe the terrestrial landscape may have little, if anything, to do with the decline. "The existence of this same decline in Chinook returns across essentially all of Alaska and the Canadian portion of the Yukon River, where human-induced freshwater habitat impacts are negligible, is an example of how simple explanations are potentially wrong," says Dr Welch. "If survival across this vast swathe of relatively pristine territory is severe enough to seriously impact salmon productivity, then there is little hope that modifying freshwater habitat in more southern regions will support a newly productive environment for salmon." Salmon live out 95% of their life in the ocean. They travel from the West Coast of North America throughout the coastal water of the Pacific Ocean for hun-

FCCs NOT THE ANSWER

WWAA membership overwhelmingly against FCCs in Skagit County

According to a recent membership survey, Skagit County farmers are overwhelmingly opposed to the idea of creating fully contained communities (FCCs) and other large developments outside city limits. State law requires counties to plan for 80% of the population to live in, and immediately around, cities and towns. Only 20% of the population should be living in rural areas. Currently, housing projects within Skagit's urban areas are reportedly not keeping up with the demand. Skagit County is considering the approval of housing projects, such as FCCs, in rural areas. These communities would most likely add increased population, stormwater runoff, and traffic in rural areas.

WWAA has long advocated against rural development projects that negatively impact agricultural neighbors. However, we also understand that there is a need for housing in our region. WWAA membership made it clear through our recent survey that most farmers don't want these communities to infringe on agricultural lands, and they certainly don't want them next to their property.

It is important that county leaders understand that this region is home to the top 1% of soils worldwide. Even our sub-prime farmlands viewed as more marginal in this area are still in the top 10% throughout the world. Associated loss of farmland and impacts to farming in the region are detrimental to the entire community, and we urge you to reach out to the County Commissioners to voice your concerns and input.



dreds, sometimes thousands, of miles. According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Chinook feed on squid and fish such as the sandlance and herring. These food sources and ocean conditions cannot be ignored in comprehensive recovery plans.

On top of poor ocean pasture health, recent illegal fishing is also taking its toll. Between 200 and 250 illegal fishing nets have been seized on the Fraser River so far this year, according to Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO), and Canadian law enforcement is stepping up its efforts to crack down on illegal fishing. South of the border, illegal gill-netting has also occurred at high rates in Washington, Idaho, and Oregon waters. "Illegal fishing, of course, results in

fish being intercepted, not reaching the spawning grounds, and not contributing to the rebuilding of those stocks," DFO Director of Salmon Management Jennifer Nener said publicly recently. "The impact of illegal activity becomes greater when there's a lot fewer fish in the river."

While WWAA remains committed to the restoration of estuary habitat under the Skagit Delta Tidegates and Fish Initiative Implementation Agreement, it is clear that threats beyond the rivers are taking a heavy toll on salmon. These include habitat destruction, competition with hatchery fish, harvesting, and large-scale changes in ocean climate.



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MILES CONTINUES IN DIRECTOR ROLE

This summer, Dr. Carol Miles was again named interim director of Washington State University's Northwestern Washington Research and Extension Center (NWREC) at Mount Vernon. Miles has worked at WSU for more than 25 years, and serves as a vegetable Extension specialist and a professor in the Department of Horticulture. In addition to her role as director, she continues to focus on crop production issues, investigating alternative crops, biodegradable plastic mulch, vegetable grafting, and cider apples.



Dr. Carol Miles remains as interim director at NWREC. Photo courtesy of WSU.

THEORY: SHADE PROVES DETRIMENTAL TO SPINACH GROWTH

For the past year, Dr. Lindsey du Toit and a PhD student in her program, Alex Batson, have been studying the effects of shade on Fusarium wilt in spinach seed production. du Toit leads the Vegetable Seed Pathology program at WSU NWREC, and her specialties and interest are the epidemiol-

ogy and management of diseases affecting vegetable seed crops (primarily small-seeded vegetables) in the Pacific Northwest. She and Batson have been screening spinach cultivars for susceptibility to the Fusarium wilt pathogen under various light intensities, created using shading in controlled greenhouse conditions. Initial research shows that Fusarium wilt is much more severe under low light intensity (shaded plots), regardless of the spinach cultivar.

The objective of this research and extension program is to contribute towards a sustainable and secure food supply by providing research and Extension support on vegetable seed crop diseases. The program serves vegetable seed growers regionally, nationally, and internationally. Her program investigates the biology, epidemiology, and management of an array of fungal, viral, and bacterial diseases that affect small-seeded vegetable seed crops in the Pacific Northwest.



Dr. Lindsey du Toit (center) and PhD student Alex Batson explain their theory to growers and peers at their greenhouse space at NWREC this summer.