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July 11, 2008

Jerry Gutzwiler, Chair
Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission
600 Capitol Way N
Olympia, WA 98501-1091

Dear Jerry:

This year's West Coast salmon fishing disaster serves as a warning for all of us and it poses serious challenges for those most impacted by fishing closures and restrictions. As you know, I am working with the Governors of California and Oregon to secure, subject to final Congressional approval, up to $170 million in federal relief funds for fishermen and women and fishing-related businesses. We have also indicated that we must increase our efforts to provide for the long-term health and sustainability of our fisheries.

I am very proud of Washington's record to protect and restore our salmon and steelhead. Our citizens have developed, and now are implementing, federally-approved salmon recovery plans. We also have fish protection plans in place for our forests, and the recent agreement under the Pacific Salmon Treaty will help significantly to return more wild fish to our spawning grounds. But we cannot rest on what we've done. When we last met I asked you to focus on conservation and ecotourism as it can provide much needed economic opportunity for our fishing dependent communities. With the most recent disaster I would like the Fish and Wildlife Commission (Commission) to do even more and provide me with a status report and recommendations on the following four areas:

- Hatchery reform: I am requesting the Commission assess our state's efforts to ensure that the conservation needs of our fishery resources are being met. Specifically, I would like the Commission to provide a brief report of the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife's (Department) approach and schedule for implementing hatchery reform measures that are consistent with science-based recommendations. This report should include current and potentially new sources of funding to ensure implementation occurs.

- Selective fisheries: The Commission should provide me with a summary and schedule of the Department's approach to convert non-tribal fisheries to fully selective fisheries to protect and promote conservation of our wild stocks. These conservation-based changes will protect wild salmon while providing for the harvest of hatchery fish and go a long way toward providing a sustainable economic future for our fishing-dependent communities.

- Economic benefits: To allow us to fully educate the public on the importance of fishing, I would like the Commission to summarize the economic benefit that our commercial and recreational fisheries provide the state. While sustainable fishing practices must be consistent with conservation needs of the fish, both fisheries have an important economic role, particularly in our rural communities.

- Tourism expansion: Washington has much to offer in the way of outdoor and nature-based experiences. As we discussed at our last meeting, I would like to have the Commission's thoughts on how to highlight tourism opportunities in these areas, especially including those that would provide benefit for our rural communities. The Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development (CTED) has implemented a strategy to expand tourist activity in Washington's coastal areas this summer, and I would like the Commission to coordinate its work with CTED in this regard.

I understand that the Department has done some very good work to date in these areas. My request is to summarize this work, assess what more we can do both short and long term with timelines for implementation. I would like to have this report by January 1, 2009, in time for our meeting early next year. Thank you for considering this request.

Sincerely,

Chris

Christine O. Gregoire
Governor

Thanks for your help on this!

cc: U.S. Senator Patty Murray
U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell
Congressman Norm Dicks
Congressman Brian Baird
Washington State Senator Ken Jacobsen
Washington State Representative Brian Blake
Dr. Jeff Koenings, Director, Department of Fish and Wildlife
Juli Wilkerson, Director, Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development