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10 November 2015

Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission
600 Capitol Way North
Olympia, Washington 98501

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FISH AND
WILDLIFE COMMISSION

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am writing to voice my enthusiastic support for the proposals before you aimed at restoring runs of wild steelhead to rivers on the Olympic Peninsula through mandatory catch-and-release management and limited fishing from boats.

Catch-and-release is not a panacea. It will not remove dams. It will not heal damaged habitat. It will not revive extinct runs. But when applied intelligently it has proven an effective management tool at reducing the overall effect of angler-caused mortality on depressed wild populations of salmonids capable of restoration. It allows us to wade in and continue fishing, responsibly.

Your staff biologists and the angling public have ready access to a mountain of hard scientific evidence on hooking mortality reaching back decades. The science is clear: bait fishing is significantly more effective than fishing with artificial lures. More fish die. When many of our rivers teemed with wild steelhead, and generations past fished primarily to eat, permissive fishing regulations were largely benign. Now that these same rivers host remnants runs—and no one really needs to eat a wild steelhead to survive—allowing a sport-fishing technique that contributes to their demise is a problem. On the other hand, more conservative regulations can help more steelhead survive. It's an opportunity.

For you, as Commissioners, there is the important matter of doing your best to produce policies that encourage public sharing of our natural resources, while

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sustaining these resources for future generations. I realize this is not easy. I also realize you are under intense pressure from commercial guides and bait fishers stubbornly insisting on the status quo in the guise of sharing the resource. This is a perverse argument. Your agency's own creel surveys on the Olympic Peninsula reveal that paid guide boats catch a radically disproportionate share of the steelhead. They dominate the fishery. This is not fairly sharing the resource.

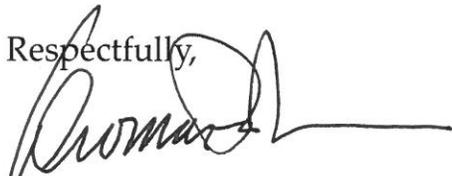
Catch and release is a partial solution to helping you fulfill this promise. As has been widely demonstrated in rivers around the world, one benefit of a successful catch-and-release fishery is to spread the wealth—allowing the largest number of anglers to enjoy a given body of water with minimal harm to the resource.

Contrary to myths being circulated, the proposal before you does not restrict our rivers exclusively to fly fishing. Any child, man or woman capable of fishing bait is also capable, with the same gear, of fishing lures. All are invited.

But the most important role a new catch-and-release policy may play is to give the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife a more effective voice in discussions with your co-managers: the Native American tribes whose nets are intercepting diminishing runs of wild Olympic steelhead. We anglers must sacrifice today for the sake of tomorrow. We must work together to get more wild spawners to upstream gravel.

We know where ignoring the scientific evidence and failure to be pro-active in the face of accelerating erosion of the wild steelhead resource leads—the empty boat ramps and empty rivers throughout Puget Sound are melancholy testament. Some of those rivers may be lost forever. On the coast there is still hope.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Thomas R. Pero', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Thomas R. Pero

Publisher