

Congressman Brian Baird

3rd Congressional District, Washington State

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**Prepared Remarks of Congressman Brian Baird
On the Introduction of the Endangered Salmon Predation Prevention Act
Press Conference at Bonneville Dam
October 16, 2006**

I want to thank Congressman Hastings for his work on this legislation.

This bill has taken months to write because it's been an inclusive process. We've reached out to all the affected partners, state agencies, tribal governments and environmental groups.

We know sea lions are not determining the fate of the spring Chinook run. There are many factors that contribute to their numbers.

But the sea lions are one factor that we can do something about.

We've got a non-endangered species eating an endangered species. We cannot stand by and let that happen.

We cannot provide more protection to one group that is non-endangered at the expense of our endangered salmon. Sea lions are not listed under the Endangered Species Act.

We spend tens of millions of dollars to save a few fish. If we're going to take drastic measures to save one to three percent of the run, then we should address the sea lion issue because frankly they're eating a heck of a lot more than we're saving.

The lessons learned at the Ballard Locks are that the Section 120 process takes too long and the salmon cannot afford the delay.

In 1972 when the Marine Mammal Protection Act was enacted, there were approximately 50,000 California Sea Lions on the West Coast.

Over the last 34 years, the population has grown steadily. Now, there are currently estimated to be between 250,000 to 300,000 California Sea Lions on the West Coast.

The sea lions are also coming earlier and staying longer.

Non lethal measures haven't worked. Rubber bullets, underwater noise, and barriers have not deterred the sea lions. They are interested in one thing: "LET'S EAT."

C-404 made a mockery of the million dollar barriers in record time. We have every reason to expect he'll back in February, with Friends.

The Army Corps of Engineers has compared using non-lethal methods to pushing a drug dealer off one street corner only to find him on the other corner, conducting business as usual.

We respect the NEPA process and that's why the bill requires a mandatory comment period. It sets strict limits. This is a temporary three year pilot project.

We have listened to the fishing community, the tribal nations and our states wrestling with the problem and asking for our help.

We believe as tough an issue as this is, it requires a common sense strategy and I thank Congressmen Hastings, Norm Dicks and Greg Walden for their work.

This bill is another tool to use in limited situation after all other options have been exhausted and it will send a strong message that the "all-you-can-eat" salmon buffet at the Bonneville Dam is closed.

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