

Gail Gatton: Thank you. My name is Gail Gatton. I'm the Executive Director for Audubon Washington, which is the statewide field office of the National Audubon Society – an organization that's been protecting birds and their habitats for the last 115 years or so. So I want to thank Ecology for holding this hearing and opportunity for public comment today. Our scientists are carefully reviewing the Supplemental – the EIS draft and we'll submit formal comments in writing. But while I was out here today to take a minute to just make a couple of comments. Other people have referenced the importance of birds in this area. More than 200 species of birds depends on the beaches, marshes, uplands and mudflats of Willapa Bay and Grays Harbor. From a bird perspective these are 2 of the most important areas in our entire state -- and they're sort of critical stopover areas for migrating birds. They support hundreds of thousands of shorebirds during the annual spring migration and they're also important nursing grounds for fisheries including the Dungeness crab we've heard about, the native salmon, and of course the large-scale shellfish production that goes on out here.

While I can't claim to be a fifth generation farmer out here I do want everyone in the room to know that my love affair with oysters goes back to being an 11-year old and winning a silver dollar for being willing to eat a raw oyster on a dare. The Audubon really appreciates the long time historical presence of the oyster industry here and it's role in providing good jobs and revenue to the region, as well as the production of seafood and the contributions that oyster growers make to the environmental quality out here. We recognize the challenges that these shrimp pose to the industry and particularly to the family farms that are out here.

Since 2014 – when the last permit was being issued – we worked to understand the impacts of the chemical pesticide use on these coastal estuaries, including a visit out here this summer at the invitation of the growers. We came out here. Our science staff came out here. We continue to have reservations about the use of chemicals to control these shrimp – especially in the absence of a better understanding of conditions and factors that influence a burrowing shrimp distribution and populations. We particularly have reservations about this specific pesticide – which, Tom, as you pointed out, is demonstrably harmful to aquatic invertebrates – which in my world, we think of that as bird food. So our priorities though are to encourage lasting solutions and help create conditions amenable to ecologically and economically sustainable shellfish aquaculture. And we look to the considerable scientific, technological and natural resource management expertise in the Pacific Northwest to invest in assessing, understanding, and fairly resolving this complex set of issues that face the growers and other stakeholders out here. Thank you for the opportunity.