

WA Dept. of Ecology's Draft EIS and Short-Term Modification to Total Dissolved Gas Criteria for WAC 173-201A

Oral Testimony from Liz Hamilton, on behalf of Northwest Sport Fishing Industry Association

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My name is Liz Hamilton and I have the good fortune of being the executive director for Northwest Sport Fishing Industry Association. In full disclosure, we are one of the petitioners for a change to the gas cap levels. We asked for 125 and we ask for the four-bay to be removed as a monitoring standard.

Here in Washington State, the sport fishing industry employs over 15,000 people in service of almost a million anglers, 950,000 license holders and we generate over 2.4 billion in economic output. 200,000 of these individuals buy an extra endorsement in order to fish in the Columbia River. And when you combine that with the Oregon endorsement, it is almost 400,000 people who interact in this basin with fish, salmon and steelhead. But things have been extremely tough for our industry for several years now. We had a drought in 2015. There was a blob off of most of the coast that persisted into '16. Ocean conditions overall have really created a nightmare legacy that persists for today.

This year Columbia River salmon and steelhead are predicted to return at roughly 50 percent of the 10-year average, which is devastating for communities that rely on fishing and is contributing to the dire plight of the southern resident orca.

We know we can do more to turn things around and we appreciate the Ecology's consideration of modifying the gas standard to 125. I'm going to keep saying 125, Heather.

I served on the Governor Inslee's task force prework group where we learned of the critical role the Columbia River spring Chinook play as a food source to southern residents. Fat-laden spring Chinook are one of the only Chinook available during the winter when orca are traveling and/or pregnant. Not surprisingly, they are known to do circles off the mouth of the Columbia River in late February through April when the springers are staging to enter the river. Our prework group had a lot of discussion around this and we landed at 125. I didn't see it on the screen, but that's where we landed from the prework group as a way to increase this source for the orca.

So given the status of salmon and steelhead (inaudible) and the orca, our businesses -- in our businesses we are disappointed in a spill agreement that just made a tweak this year. I mean, basically just removing one of the monitoring standards is a tweak. At a time when the Governor asked us to be bold and when the Governor puts a 1.2 billion dollar budget out for orcas, we really wanted to see more than a tweak.

Decades of empirical data modeled by CSS said if we went to -- if we went to 125 24/7, we could see a two-and-a-half fold increase in the return of spring salmon to the basin. That's bold.

Gas level trauma in salmon is sampled throughout the spring outmigration and anyone can look at this data on FPC website. And what I have seen from looking at it over the years is that you don't see any of the action criteria met as long as you stay under 125.

So we are appreciative of the region's effort to change the total dissolved gas standards to provide better protections for salmon and steelhead. We do object to the two-step standard and we are here to testify today that we believe that the standard should just be raised to 125 and not do it all again next year because we already know what the fish need. We already know they are in dire shape and we ask that we do it right now, so thank you. Appreciate the opportunity.