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A proposal was presented by Cooke Aquaculture to begin farming biologically engineered steelhead trout in their Puget Sound net pens and is now applying to modify existing water quality permits.

Cooke Aquaculture was fined for negligence in maintenance of the facility, and is currently being sued by Wild Fish Conservancy under the Clean Water Act. Documents released in the course of that lawsuit reveal that according to the net pen's own manufacturers, the pens are not built for the challenging conditions of Puget Sound and all remain at risk of catastrophic failure.

The dangers are obvious enough that Governor Jay Inslee announced a moratorium on new net pen leases, and the state legislature acted to phase out Atlantic salmon aquaculture by 2024. Investigations by the state and Wild Fish Conservancy revealed failures of maintenance, inadequate emergency response plans, and evidence that the industry had imported and released Atlantic salmon infected with dangerous exotic diseases into Puget Sound.

It is shocking that the company is pushing forward to clear other regulatory hurdles in their attempt to expand net pen aquaculture in Puget Sound and that the Department of Fish and Wildlife would ever issue a mitigated determination of non-significance. This requires neither a full environmental assessment nor environmental impact statement under the State Environmental Policy Act. Such an assessment would have considered the risks of diseases, pollution, further escapes and collapses, and the potential harm to federally-listed native steelhead.

Please act to stop this potential devastation to what little we have left of our local fish & wildlife.

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