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There are clearly anti-aquaculture groups with ulterior motives (ie. $$$) that claim that net pen aquaculture is harmful for the environment or that the fish being cultured pass rampant disease to the native fish stocks. Unfortunately these groups like to pull the wool over the sheep's eyes by misleading the public with their stated "facts" while failing to provide any hard scientific data to back up their claims. Whereas, there is plenty of scientifically peer-reviewed literature supporting the actual fact that organic pollution from net pens is minimal. Sowles and Churchhill monitored net pen aquaculture over a 15 year period in Maine and showed there was no permanent damage. Washington's very own Dept. of Fisheries modeled worst case scenarios of 5 farms in an embayment area and showed negligible increases in dissolved Nitrogen, phytoplankton or zooplankton. Rensel (1988) monitored a worse case scenario of a large farm in a shallow passage of Puget Sound showing there was no increase in phytoplankton density & growth rates on the farm with and without fish. There was also no significant increases in Nitrogen seen downstream from the farm and in fact 30 m downstream 80% of the ammonia had already been converted to nitrite which suggests a rapid decomposition of potential nitrogenous wastes. In Norway, Husa et al.(2012) studied the regional impact of Atlantic salmon farming in an intensive production area. The area farmed 70,000 metric tons of salmon annually vs. Puget Sound which has farmed 8,000 metric tons at its maximum. Additionally, the area of Norway is one of the most intensively farmed areas in the world (309 sq miles) vs. the Puget Sound that has a surface area of over 1000 sq miles. Their findings showed there was good ecological conditions of the parameters studied and there was little evidence of regional impact despite the production level. With this type of ACTUAL scientific evidence I don't know how groups can claim that the farming that occurs in the Puget Sound is destroying the ecosystem or negatively impacting the native fish stocks. There is plenty of previous research to show that Atlantic salmon cannot thrive and reproduce in the Pacific, so having a non-native species was never truly a real concern. Unfortunately, these groups have perpetuated untruths to the contrary such as claiming the non-native fish exposed the local stocks to diseases they otherwise would not have been. However, though that is entirely untrue, what excuses are these groups going to come up with now that Cooke Aquaculture is planning to switch species to a native sterile fish? Even though it was untrue that the Atlantic salmon harbored foreign pathogens these anti-aquaculture groups will be hard pressed to make the same claim from a cultured native species. I fully support Cooke Aquaculture Pacific's permit modification request to culture steelhead as the actual science supports that there has never been a negative environmental impact from organic pollution from net pens. More importantly, US net pen aquaculture is going to be a much needed commodity for a nutritious and stable source of protein to support our growing population!