

# Patrick McKee

I'm a Mercer Island, King County resident.

It's no secret that the Salish Sea is poised on the tragic verge of catastrophe; the crashing of wild and native salmon and steelhead runs threatens this whole diverse world we live in, from the mushrooms on the forest floor to the orca pods in the Sound. Every decision the Washington Department of Ecology makes at this point needs to consider the effects on the health of the Pacific Northwest biosphere in its entirety.

It's past time to phase out Puget Sound open water net pens. Cooke Aquaculture has proposed transitioning their leases and permits from their FAILED Atlantic salmon farming to raise a new, biologically altered form of steelhead. This is in advance of the 2022 phase out of FAILED Atlantic salmon net pen operations. We can't let this go forward.

Look, Cooke Aquaculture has a dirty record on the Salish Sea. Pollution from food, fish waste, parasites, virus and disease, and chemical and pharmaceutical effluent have an adverse impact on wild and native salmon populations, as well as on other native fishes and birds, and up the food chain to all the species that feed on them. It's been shown that the untreated nitrogen discharged by the FAILED Atlantic salmon net pens is roughly equivalent to the treated waste stream of the city of Tacoma. And phosphorus? Take the equivalent of Tacoma, and raise it by an amount corresponding to the waste streams of Bellingham, Everett, and Port Angeles combined. These levels do not factor in the additional animal waste produced by all the wildlife attracted to the pens - birds, sea lions, orcas, seals, and fish.

In addition to pollution dispersing from estuarial net pen operations, we know net pen collapse is inevitable. Cooke has demonstrated their inability to prevent the escapement of farmed fish. And when these "steelhead" escape, they pose a risk to native fish populations. They've been genetically modified to grow faster - with increased appetite. They may simply outcompete native salmon, steelhead and trout in nearby estuaries or rivers; indeed, they may even prey on them. After the Cypress Island collapse in 2017, Cooke was able to recover fewer than half the escaped fish. And Cooke has not produced a plan to manage a recovery effort that will remove farmed fish without threatening native fish, sea mammals, and other wildlife.

Switching from their FAILED Atlantic salmon farming operation to an operation raising a genetically modified version of a Pacific coast species will not reduce the pollution and water quality risks posed by Cooke Aquaculture's net pens; nor can Cooke show that the escapement impact on local fish and wildlife will be any less.

Getting rid of open water net pens in Puget Sound is the only solution, and it's long overdue. The recovery of wild and native salmon and steelhead stocks is crucial to the long term health of the Salish Sea - the world we all share.