

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 16, 2009

Contact: Colin Cochran, 503.631.4747, safeforsalmon@gmail.com

WIN-WIN SOLUTION FOR COLUMBIA RIVER FISHERIES GOES TO LEGISLATURE

The SAFE for Salmon proposal, SB 554/HB 2734, proposed by the SAFE for Salmon coalition, resolves a long-standing dispute between sport and commercial fishing interests

SALEM – SB 554 and its House companion, HB 2734, co-sponsored by a bi-partisan core of legislators in both houses, offers the 2009 Legislature a chance to end forever divisive and often bitter feuding over harvests of the Columbia River's non-treaty, non-endangered hatchery salmon.

In a nutshell, the bill:

- a) – Moves all non-tribal commercial fishing into well-established (and perhaps some new) selected SAFE zones off the mainstem Columbia River below Bonneville Dam.
- b) – Increases the number of hatchery smolts released in those zones.
- c) – Prioritizes the lower Columbia mainstem for sport fishing.
- d) – Ends wasteful gill-net bycatch of federally protected salmon and small sturgeon.
- e) – Reduces stray hatchery salmon on spawning grounds.
- f) – Increases smolts (especially coho and fall chinook) entering the Pacific Ocean.

SB 554/HB 2734, is proposed by a broad coalition of sport and conservation groups known as “SAFE for Salmon.” It provides a permanent separation of sport and commercial fishing while enhancing fisheries for each group.

Commercial and sport-fishing industries are locked in annual arguments over catch allocations of hatchery salmon in the Columbia. The impasse currently embroils fish and wildlife commissions in Oregon and Washington in an untimely debate over who gets how many fish, leaving user groups reeling from unpredictable, abbreviated seasons.

SAFE for Salmon proposes to use the SAFE (Select Area Fisheries Enhancement) zones as intended when they were created in the 1990s.

“Millions of Bonneville Power Administration rate-payer dollars have been spent to provide safe areas where the gill-net fleet can fish with minimum effect on ESA listed stocks,” said Bill Shake, a co-author of the proposal. Shake is a retired northwest regional assistant director for fisheries and Columbia River

senior policy adviser for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. His timely testimony was made in January 2008 to the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission.

"SAFE for Salmon is one of those rare creatures that benefits everybody at little to no cost," said Jim Martin, principal author of the SAFE for Salmon proposal and retired chief of fisheries for the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. "Wild fish avoid capture in gill nets, thus aiding their recovery; commercial fishing fleets capture the same amount or more fish, anglers get full and regular fishing seasons, and the Oregon economy reaps the benefits from two rejuvenated and healthy industries that create jobs, drive our local communities and pump millions into the state."

Senator Alan Bates (D-Ashland), SAFE for Salmon's chief sponsor in the Senate, praised SAFE for Salmon as a new way forward. "For too long the competing interests on the Columbia River have been locked in conflict as one side's gains often came at the expense of the others," he said. "SAFE for Salmon is unique in its balance and offers a fair compromise that will help all sides, including the fish, prosper beyond their current state."

SAFE for Salmon, has been introduced in the Oregon House of Representative by Representative Scott Brunn (R-West Linn). Brunn called gill-netting on the lower Columbia "antiquated and indiscriminate." "The evidence that gill-netting causes ecologic and economic damage is clear," he said. "It's time to bring Oregon's Salmon fisheries into the 21st century."

###

For more information on the SAFE for Salmon Campaign go to www.safeforsalmon.com or call 503.631.4747