

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HJM 4043

As Passed Legislature

Brief Description: Petitioning Congress to restore Mitchell Act funding.

Sponsors: Representatives Pennington, Basich, Fuhrman, Hatfield, Regala, Johnson, Robertson, Jacobsen, Hankins, Morris, Buck, Beeksma, Smith, Pelesky, Hargrove, Schoesler, Foreman, Hickel, Mitchell, Silver, Blanton, Ballasiotes, Carrell, Mulliken, Radcliff, Skinner, Hymes, Goldsmith, McMahan, Linville, D. Sommers, Conway, Scheurman, Keiser, McMorris and Stevens.

Brief History:

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 2/23/96, 91-7.

Staff: Nancy Stevenson (786-7137)

Background: Congress passed the Mitchell Act in 1938 to compensate the Northwest region for salmon losses caused by the federal hydropower system being developed on the Columbia River. The hydropower dams prevented fish from traveling to reach their natural spawning grounds. The Mitchell Act established a fish hatchery system along the Columbia River and its tributaries in Oregon and Washington. Mitchell Act facilities produce coho, fall and spring chinook, steelhead, and searun cutthroat. There are 27 hatcheries in the system.

The federal budget for federal fiscal year 1996 reduced Mitchell Act hatchery funding by 20 percent. When notified by the National Marine Fisheries Service of the reduction, the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife determined it would be necessary to close three hatcheries and cut back operations in four others, thereby significantly reducing the quantity of hatchery-produced salmon in the Columbia River.

The loss of hatchery fish exacerbates the problems of an already weak Columbia River fishery. The fishery has been affected by adverse ocean conditions, restrictions imposed by the federal Endangered Species Act, and recent natural disasters. Communities dependent on the Columbia River fishery have voiced serious concerns regarding the economic impacts of the lost federal funding and the associated decrease in hatchery-produced fish.

Summary of Bill: Congress is requested to restore Mitchell Act funding to the \$18.5 million level provided in federal fiscal year 1995.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.