

SENATE BILL REPORT

HJM 4026

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Natural Resources, Parks & Recreation, February 23, 2000

Brief Description: Requesting a review of migratory bird predation on salmonid stocks.

Sponsors: Representatives Doumit, Buck, Anderson, Sump, Eickmeyer, Hatfield and Schoesler.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Natural Resources, Parks & Recreation: 2/23/2000 [DPA].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES, PARKS & RECREATION

Majority Report: Do pass as amended.

Signed by Senators T. Sheldon, Vice Chair; Morton, Oke, Rossi, Snyder, Spanel and Stevens.

Staff: Ross Antipa (786-7413)

Background: The Migratory Bird Act of 1918 declares that all migratory birds and their parts are fully protected. The Migratory Bird Treaty Act is the domestic law that affirms or implements the United States' commitment to four international conventions (with Canada, Japan, Mexico, and Russia) for the protection of a shared migratory bird resource. The law has been amended many times. The Caspian tern is one of the species protected under the act.

The largest colony of Caspian terns in the United States resides on a sand island near Astoria, Oregon, called Rice Island. About 20,000 terns live on the two-mile long island formed by dredged spoils. From this vantage point, the birds feast on young salmon migrating to the ocean. In 1998, the terns were thought to have eaten between six and 25 million salmon smolts, out of an estimated 100 million heading for the ocean. Scientists say that predation would not be a problem if salmon runs were stronger, but with listed species any stress can be serious.

Wildlife officials have been trying to relocate the birds by creating habitat on another island closer to the ocean. The effort seems to have had some success. Fifteen hundred terns have moved off of Rice Island to the other island. The goal is to relocate all of the terns. The initial project, which cost \$560,000, was paid for by the Bonneville Power Administration.

Summary of Amended Bill: The state of Washington is acknowledged as having invested a great deal of effort and funding to recover salmon populations. Predation by Caspian terns is viewed as a significant issue for recovery of listed fish species in Washington. The Migratory Bird Treaty Act is viewed as ineffective in managing migratory bird predation on salmonids. Therefore, the President and Congress are asked to amend the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 to provide a more effective means to allow for the protection and restoration of salmonid populations. Congress is also asked to fund joint federal and state

research on migratory and resident bird interactions with salmonids and to grant at least limited management authority for state and federal agencies to remove those migratory and resident birds preying on listed fish stocks at areas of restricted fish passage.

Congress is also requested to prevent the movement of migratory bird nesting colonies to other geographic areas where fish stocks could be impacted.

Amended Bill Compared to Original Bill: Resident bird predators shall also be considered for control measures. Colonies of bird predators shall not be relocated to areas where impacts could occur on sensitive fish stocks.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Testimony For: Bird predators take a large percentage of Columbia River salmon smolts during out migration. Significant predation occurs in other estuary areas as well. Resident birds take a large number of salmon and steelhead in freshwater areas. More control measures are needed for predatory birds.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: PRO: Frank Urabeck, Northwest Marine Trade Association/Trout Unlimited; Rocky Beach, WDFW.