

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HJM 4003

As Reported By House Committee On:
Agriculture & Rural Development

Brief Description: Concerning the preservation of salmon.

Sponsors: Representatives Mastin, Rayburn, Lisk, Sheahan, Grant, Bray, Ludwig, Chandler, Schoesler, Ballard, Foreman, Roland, Edmondson, Lemmon and Hansen.

Brief History:

Reported by House Committee on:
Agriculture & Rural Development, February 15, 1993, DP.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 10 members:
Representatives Rayburn, Chair; Kremen, Vice Chair;
Chandler, Ranking Minority Member; Schoesler, Assistant
Ranking Minority Member; Chappell; Foreman; Grant;
Karahalios; Lisk; and Roland.

Staff: Kenneth Hirst (786-7105).

Background: In December 1991, the federal government listed stocks of Snake River sockeye salmon as being "endangered" under the federal Endangered Species Act. In May 1992, Snake River spring/summer and fall chinook were listed as being "threatened" under the act.

The Northwest Power Planning Council, state and federal agencies, and others have been taking actions to improve fish passage, screening, and other protection facilities in various parts of the Columbia and Snake River basins. The Corps of Engineers expected improved juvenile fish bypass facilities to be operational by the end of 1992 at six dams on the mainstems of the Columbia and Snake rivers. Two additional facilities are expected to be operational by 1998.

Some proposals for enhancing fish passage involve increasing the water velocities in and near reservoirs. From March 1 through March 31 of last year, the Corps of Engineers conducted a test to examine the effect of reducing reservoir size, or "drawing down" reservoirs, on water velocities. The reservoirs behind Lower Granite and Little Goose dams on the lower Snake River were lowered below their minimum

operating levels. Navigation through the locks at the dams is precluded at these levels.

Summary of Bill: The president of the United States, Congress, the National Marine Fisheries Service, and the civil works division of the U.S. Army are requested to limit drawdowns on the Columbia-Snake River system to the minimum operating pools or minimum irrigation pool on the John Day Reservoir.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Testimony For: (1) The economic, not just the environmental, aspects of salmon protection and recovery strategies must be considered. (2) Drawing down the reservoirs behind Columbia and Snake River dams below the minimum operating levels of the dams adversely affects the region in which those dams are located, especially the navigation in the region. No data analysis based on a "best biology and least cost" approach supports radical drawdowns of those reservoirs. (3) Salmon recovery plans should address mortality issues and the actual biological needs of the salmon.

Testimony Against: (1) The courts have ordered the flushing of reservoirs on the Sacramento River to assist salmon runs; the order should serve as a warning to this region not to jeopardize its ability to prepare a salmon protection and recovery plan which will gain the approval of the National Marine Fisheries Service. (2) Any plan must be regionwide. Passage of this memorial may be viewed in other states in the region as Washington operating on its own.

Witnesses: Scott Taylor, Washington Public Ports Association (pro); Representative Mastin (pro); Dick Erickson, Washington State Water Resources Association (pro); Ted Bottiger (pro); and Dave McCraney, Department of Trade and Economic Development (con).