



PROMOTING THE PROTECTION, CONSERVATION AND RESTORATION OF NATURAL FOREST ECOSYSTEMS AND THEIR PROCESSES ON THE OLYMPIC PENINSULA, INCLUDING FISH AND WILDLIFE HABITAT, AND SURROUNDING ECOSYSTEMS

August 30, 2017

The Honorable Jay Inslee
Governor of the State of Washington
Office of the Governor
PO Box 40002
Olympia, Washington 98504-0002
VIA Electronic Communication

Dear Governor Inslee:

I am writing on behalf of the Board of Directors of the Olympic Forest Coalition (OFCO) to address our concerns regarding salmon net pen farming in Washington marine waters. Our organization, based on the Olympic Peninsula, has a long history of working with both State and Federal agencies to ensure that the ecosystems encompassing the forests, rivers, and associated marine waters of the Peninsula and throughout the region, stay healthy, support biodiversity and recreational opportunities, buffer against climate change, and provide for the long-term survivability of the region's native fish and wildlife. Our organization is grateful for the immediate actions taken by your office to suspend permitting additional salmon net pens. However, we believe that effective and permanent steps must be taken to protect endangered salmon species. We are petitioning you today to permanently eliminate the very real risk to the future of NW salmon and all the species dependent upon salmon for their very survival, including our very imperiled iconic resident orca population, and the cultural and local communities and tribes which rely on the native salmon fishery. That risk is the permitting of salmon farming in Washington waters.

Our endangered salmon species are key to maintaining that ecosystem health. Research has shown us that healthy forests and healthy fish are intricately connected. Many factors have led to the very low numbers of fish returning in important salmon runs on the Olympic Peninsula as well as throughout the region. These factors include over-harvesting, ocean-going dredge nets and factory cannery ships, pollution and habitat degradation. Rising ocean temperatures pose another risk. Salmon farms are an unnecessary additional risk to native fisheries.

Salmon farms introduce diseases which can affect native fish, based on substantiated research carried out over many years in British Columbia by renowned scientist, Dr. Alexandra Morton. The salmon farms occupy near-shore habitat critical to the migration of native salmon, particularly young salmon. Salmon farms are susceptible to escapement. When farmed fish escape, they compete with native juvenile Pacific salmon and steelhead for food and habitat, as well as preying on native species. Like Pacific salmon, Atlantic salmon spawn in the fall. The escaped fish are capable of spawning and will begin entering Puget Sound rivers to attempt to spawn. We already have received reports of Atlantic Salmon entering our rivers. Whether the escaped fish succeed in producing offspring or not, they will compete on the spawning grounds with native salmon, including endangered Puget Sound Chinook, posing a threat to the spawning success of native salmon. Our native salmon are part of the cultural identity of the Pacific NW, and are at the very heart of NW native culture and survival, even today.

For these reasons, OFCO supports a total ban on salmon farming in Washington waters. Such activities are currently carried out by large scale, international corporations who care little for the devastation to native fauna resulting from their actions, particularly salmon. A Case in point was the total pen failure of the Cooke Aquaculture project near Cypress Island on August 21st that resulted in the release of 305,000 non-native Atlantic salmon into Washington's waters. Tidal data from that time-period shows tidal fluctuations at the time of the pen failure were well within normal expected ranges. The pen failure was simply an operational malfunction of immense magnitude. We simply cannot afford the risk that this type of biological disaster can happen again, and we hope that is not too late to save our endangered native salmon.

We support the efforts of the Wild Fish Conservancy, NW Tribes and other entities who will be gathered together in solidarity on September 16th in Puget Sound to call for a ban on salmon farming in Washington. We urge you to join with the other west coast states of Alaska, Oregon and California to permanently ban the permitting of salmon farms in our waters.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Lorna Smith". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Lorna Smith
Vice President
Board of Directors