

Chair Imeson, State Forester Daughtery and members of the board,

My name is Bob Rees, Executive Director for the Association of Northwest Steelheaders and founder of the NW Guides and Anglers Association. I always appreciate a little time in November to give you the fishing report for the season. To put it bluntly, our west coast fishermen are likely to qualify for disaster relief next year, our fisheries have crashed once again.

Nearly unprecedented closures cut most north coast fisheries well short of historic opportunity, with the most recent closure affecting the entire network of river systems that flow from the Tillamook and Clatsop State Forests. Our natural fish hatcheries, these two state forests are sick. The sport fleet had 5 days to prosecute a wild coho season in September of this year, pretty hard to build a successful business model off of. Can you imagine if the timber industry had 5 days to harvest all the trees they needed to fuel their industry for the year?

Still in violation of water quality standards that meet the needs for the spawning and rearing of wild salmon and steelhead, every major north coast river continues to fail to live up to its potential for production. Between lethal summer water temperatures that kill fish, both juveniles and returning adult wild spring Chinook, and torrential fall rains that suffocate incubating eggs in silt, this ecosystem remains highly dysfunctional in its current state. Furthermore, the current Forest Management Plan with an inadequate strategy for growing old-growth stands that buffer against both of these lethal events, and offer an opportunity to RETAIN complex structure in these flash flood prone river systems, offers no resolution.

Major road systems remain close to fish-bearing streams and the Salmon Anchor Habitat strategies were weakened in 2010, with clear-cut caps removed. In an era when we had an opportunity for conservation gains, we once again fell short of recognizing the benefits of salmon to our rural communities.

I recognize the Board adopted modest gains on private forest land buffers not that long ago, but when Oregon is the west coast state with the weakest protections on state and private forest lands, it's not a high bar to reach. Federal forest protections are paying dividends one would expect for Oregon's wild salmon. Coho, spring Chinook and steelhead are making remarkable gains in watersheds on federal lands such as the Siuslaw National Forest. The Siltcoos and Tahkenitch systems have seen historic returns and the Umpqua River this fall was awash with wild coho. The model for recovery is out there, I guess we just haven't got there yet.

I'd like to think a revised FMP is possible, one that recognizes fish as a forest product too. I recognize that there may be too many barriers for such an initiative in the near future, but a habitat conservation plan seems like a possibility, and a good place to start.

I'll leave you with one final thought. You are likely to hear that ocean conditions are largely to blame for the great salmon crash of 2018 and 2019, which is largely true, but just how much control do we have on management strategies for unfavorable ocean events, other than managing for the organic debris delivery that fuels the entire upwelling food web when washed off of the Continental Shelf?

Thank you for your time and service to Oregon.

