

## **SEATTLE POST-INTELLIGENCER**

[http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/opinion/265462\\_frank05.html](http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/opinion/265462_frank05.html)

### **Ocean salmon recovery is all about habitat**

*Wednesday, April 5, 2006*

**BILLY FRANK JR.**  
GUEST COLUMNIST

A lot of misplaced anger will be directed at the Pacific Fishery Management Council as it meets in Sacramento this week to set ocean salmon fishing harvest levels. That's because the wrong people will be sitting across the table from representatives of thousands of fishermen and residents of coastal communities who will suffer because of poor land- and water-use decisions made on the Klamath River four years ago.

Those decisions in the Klamath River basin are the direct cause of the crisis now faced by coastal communities from the Channel Islands to Astoria, and which also threaten fisheries along the Washington coast and in Puget Sound.

But it won't be the secretaries of Commerce and Interior or the chairman of the White House Council on Environmental Quality -- those responsible for the collapse of Klamath River chinook stocks -- who will be listening to the heartbreaking testimony in Sacramento. They won't be around to discuss the consequences of their decisions.

We expect the PFMC to take the only action it can to protect the salmon: reduce harvest. After all, cutting harvest has been the major response to declining salmon runs for the past 20 years. We accept that burden year after year with the hope that some day habitat - - the Big H -- will be addressed with the same conviction that we have shown in reducing harvests.

We are not in this mess because of harvest. Our harvest management process works. We didn't cause the problems that have led to these fishing closures, but we will step up to protect the resource.

I don't kid myself for a second that I won't soon be in the shoes of those fishermen in California and Oregon. If we ignore the importance of protecting salmon habitat, the closures, restrictions and resulting economic shockwave that is beginning down south will head this way.

Salmon recovery begins and ends with the Big H.

In Puget Sound we have made great strides in how the other Hs -- harvest and hatcheries -- affect wild salmon stocks. Through the Shared Strategy for Puget Sound, a bottoms-up cooperative conservation effort that is bringing together everyone with a stake in the salmon resource, we are integrating all of the Hs in a balanced approach to wild salmon recovery.

We have completed a recovery plan for threatened Puget Sound chinook that is now under review by the National Marine Fisheries Service, the federal agency in charge of implementing the Endangered Species Act.

What makes this plan different is that NMFS was an active participant in the development of the recovery plan. Now we must act to implement this solid plan.

Harvest and hatcheries are powerful management tools, but it's the Big H that brings salmon back year after year. If we lose sight of that on Puget Sound, like has happened on the Klamath and Columbia rivers, we will soon be looking at fishing closures in our back yard.

There is an acceptance, by leaders back east and even by some folks out here, that cutting harvest and watching salmon disappear is somehow OK.

As long as they can take water, cut down trees and build shopping malls, they're fine with salmon and fisherman becoming extinct.

I can't accept that fate. I don't understand how salmon can be less important than a new shopping mall or road.

The Big H is sitting here for us to take on in Western Washington. To save our region from the fate of Oregon and California, we must make sure the mistakes of the Klamath River aren't repeated here.

---

*Billy Frank Jr. is chairman of the NW Indian Fisheries Commission.*

**© 1998-2006 Seattle Post-Intelligencer**