The Editor
The Reel News
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Lake Stevens, WA 98258-9400 April 23, 2010

Dear Editor:

We wish to respond to statements in an article (Jim Branch) and a letter (Conrad Schloredt) published in your April issue. Although we know both men to be knowledgeable and experienced on salmon issues, we take exception to their apparent contention that there is no need to protect local wild salmon since they no longer exist.

Puget Sound Chinook Salmon are listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. Recovery, under the act, requires the establishment of viable wild populations that exist in the absence of artificial production. That requirement is not likely to change. The Hatchery Scientific Review Group (HSRG) defines wild adult salmon as those resulting from natural spawning since these fish have demonstrated the fitness required to survive under the specific condition existing in their home waters. Although this definition includes adult fish with varying degrees of hatchery origin ancestry, greatly reducing ongoing breeding with hatchery origin spawners will allow natural selection to proceed unabated. Based upon an extensive review of the scientific documentation, the HSRG has concluded that the existing natural habitat would produce at least twice the number of wild Chinook salmon if hatchery origin influence was reduced to a specified level.

There are countless local examples of the importance of natural selection in adapting salmon and steelhead to specific environments: spring, summer, fall, "upriver bright", and tule Chinook; summer, winter, spring, "A and B run" steelhead, and many more. The key is to let nature work without interference from fish more adapted to survival in trays and raceways. There are, however, many examples of hatchery origin trout and salmon (although more of the former) that, unfettered by ongoing stocking, resulted in viable wild populations. For example, Chinook salmon from a single California hatchery population that were stocked in New Zealand have been self sustaining since 1905. These fish have developed in to several distinct populations with differing timing and freshwater residence. Similar results are occurring throughout the Great Lakes and Chile from plants made with Green River Chinook during the 1960s and 70s.

A key to Chinook salmon recovery is to fully and selectively harvest the hatchery fish and to reserve our natural habitat for use of wild salmon. Unfortunately, the current version of the Puget Sound Chinook Harvest Management Plan fails to recognize this fact. Hopefully, the National Marine Fisheries Service, responsible for reviewing the plan, will do its job.

Sincerely,

Pete Bergman Frank Haw