

**Testimony of Sara LaBorde
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Madam Chairman, members of the Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today to provide my views on the Pacific Salmon Stronghold Conservation Act (H.R. 2055) and the National Fish Habitat Conservation Act (H.R. 2565).

My name is Sara LaBorde and I serve as Special Assistant to the Director of Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (“WDFW”) and Chair of the Salmon Stronghold Partnership. My agency is a member of the Western Native Trout Initiative, a recognized National Fish Habitat Partnership under the National Fish Habitat Action Plan (NFHAP). My primary responsibilities at the Department of Fish and Wildlife concern statewide salmon recovery and hatchery and harvest reform implementation. Prior to this, I served as Regional Director for WDFW’s Coastal and Hood Canal region, Special Assistant to the WDFW Commission as well as the Public Involvement Coordinator. I have worked for WDFW for over twenty years. However, I began my career with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources restoring trout streams and improving state forestlands. Before moving to Washington, I spent three years with the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation starting their wildlife education program and Project WILD.

Today I would like to share with you the perspective from a state fish and wildlife manager and someone who has been engaged with the Salmon Stronghold Partnership from the outset. Principally, I hope to address:

- 1) The need and opportunity to “complete the picture” in salmon management and conservation by explicitly supporting voluntary, incentive-based protection and restoration of our healthiest remaining wild salmon populations; and
- 2) How the Pacific Salmon Stronghold Conservation Act of 2009 (“Salmon Stronghold Act”) will assist Washington State and others’ efforts to integrate fish management and conservation into a comprehensive and holistic “All H” framework.

Finally, I will explain why we also support a complementary and compatible national initiative to catalyze fish habitat “joint-ventures”

**FEDERAL POLICY TO IDENTIFY AND PROTECT SALMON STRONGHOLDS WILL
“COMPLETE THE PICTURE” OF SALMON CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT**

Current federal salmon policy recognizes the need for international cooperation on this highly transboundary species through the U.S.– Canada Pacific Salmon Treaty (creating the Pacific Salmon Commission to implement the treaty and advise on harvest allocation and related management issues) and the North Pacific Anadromous Fish Commission (ban on North Pacific high seas salmon fishing). Federal policy also shapes salmon conservation and management through the Endangered Species Act, funded in large part through the Pacific Salmon Coastal Recovery Funds.

While each of these federal mandates and authorities fulfills an important piece of national salmon policy, there is a compelling need to enact federal policy to support the identification, protection and restoration of our healthiest remaining wild salmon populations – “salmon strongholds”. As I will explain, protecting our strong populations restores to prominence a fundamental tenet of conservation biology – to conserve core centers of species abundance and genetic diversity.

A Sharp Focus on Wild Salmon Strongholds

The purpose of the Salmon Stronghold Partnership is to identify and protect a network of the healthiest remaining wild Pacific salmon ecosystems in North America to ensure the long-term survival of salmon, steelhead and the many species that depend on them. The Stronghold Partnership is a voluntary, incentive-based initiative intended to supplement ongoing ecosystem protection and restoration efforts by providing leadership, enhanced coordination and public and private resources to support priority actions in salmon strongholds. The Partnership includes local communities, state and federal agencies, nonprofit organizations, tribes, business interests and private landowners who are working collaboratively on salmon conservation and restoration activities across Washington, Oregon, Idaho, California, and Alaska.

The Salmon Stronghold Act will provide a high-level forum to improve coordination among key public and private actors; address cross-cutting issues affecting multiple strongholds; and leverage private funds to implement high value conservation actions within strongholds. Our goal is to improve policies affecting strong salmon populations and deliver public and private resources as efficiently as possible directly to local entities implementing protection and restoration actions.

The Salmon Stronghold Act will assist state governments like Washington State to accelerate implementation of a holistic, comprehensive salmon conservation and management approach that integrates the four “H’s” (habitat, harvest, hatchery and hydro).

State and Tribal salmon management has been focusing on developing ways to protect wild populations while harvesting hatchery fish. This focus on meeting conservation needs and harvest goals for a variety of stakeholders has led us to understand the importance of all the H’s: habitat, hatcheries, harvest and hydropower—working together to implement ecosystem-based wild salmon goals. Washington’s experience and experimentation in this area is instructive, with its Tribal and State co-managed salmon fisheries and presence of both ESA listed and non-listed wild salmon stocks.

Recently, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife adopted an integrated “All-H” management framework to overcome the historic “silo” approach to determining harvest, hatchery and habitat strategies and approaches. Identifying strongholds and coordinating federal efforts with state, Tribal and private ones, will fill a hole in salmon protection and restoration for populations critical to maintaining the long term abundance and diversity of wild stocks. Stronghold sites, and the organizational capacity provided by the make-up of public and private actors engaged in the Salmon Stronghold Partnership, provide an ideal venue to pilot salmon policy integration strategies, in addition to accelerating ongoing protection and restoration actions in these systems.

For example, in its recent review of all of Washington’s hatchery programs, the congressionally-sponsored Hatchery Scientific Review Group (HSRG) concluded that:

- (a) hatchery and harvest reforms alone will not achieve recovery of listed populations (habitat improvements are also necessary), and
- (b) the effectiveness of habitat actions will be greatly increased if they are combined with hatchery and harvest reforms.

Under the HSRG assumptions, analysis of the “Primary” populations in the Lower Columbia Chinook Evolutionary Significant Unit suggests that the benefits of habitat quality improvements would more than double if combined with hatchery reforms. The Salmon Stronghold Act will provide the focus and forum to bring these elements together for strong populations (see www.hatcheryreform.us; Columbia River Hatchery Reform Project; Final Systemwide Report, p. 12)

Salmon Conservation and Management requires system-wide, cross-cutting policy coordination and harmonization. The Salmon Stronghold Partnership provides a unique cooperative forum for public and private stakeholders to improve our salmon management and conservation policies.

As you know, the life-cycle of salmonids crosses freshwater and marine domains, political boundaries, and land ownerships. Salmon challenge our commitment to “eco-system based management” in practical ways, not the least of which is to align the policies and approaches of our federal land managers and regulatory bodies to ensure compatibility with state and local salmon conservation and management objectives. In addition to accelerating work at the watershed scale, state managers consider better federal, state and local policy coordination and implementation at a larger regional scale a major need and opportunity addressed by the Salmon Stronghold Act. A few examples raised by our partners include:

1. Mitigating and adapting to climate change in salmon strongholds

Our leading scientists tell us that relatively intact, well-functioning ecosystems, including most or all salmon strongholds, will be critical to climate change mitigation and adaption approaches. Salmon and climate experts know that these systems are critical to take advantage of the natural resilience of salmon. Functional strongholds will sustain the ecological needs in order for wild salmon to adapt to the changing conditions that will face them. The Salmon Stronghold Partnership provides an ideal voluntary, incentive-based vehicle to develop and pilot climate change mitigation and adaptation approaches at a meaningful, multi-state regional scale.

2. Pilot streamlined permitting for conservation projects

Under provisions of Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act, a federal agency that funds or authorizes activities that may affect a listed anadromous fish species must consult with the National Marine Fisheries Service to ensure that proposed actions are not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the species. While this regulation is necessary, its one-size-fits-all approach makes no accommodation for thoroughly assessed activities proposed to enhance ecosystem function. Consequently, the permitting process often obstructs restoration project implementation due to the added expense and/or unmanageable duration of the application and review processes. Likewise, sections 401 and 404 of the Clean Water Act, which govern projects impacting wetlands and water quality respectfully, similarly do little to distinguish between permitting for potentially harmful development activities and habitat enhancement projects. Like the Section 7 consultation process, these permitting processes often lead to significant delays, cost overruns, and sometimes cancellation of valuable ecosystem enhancement projects.

In recent years, conservation organizations, federal agency personnel, and members of Congress have proposed streamlining the permitting processes for conservation projects. Strongholds identified through the Salmon Stronghold Partnership present unique opportunities for conservation partners and the permitting agencies to pilot and evaluate these streamlined approaches in other jurisdictions.

3. Piloting innovative voluntary, incentive-based, market approaches to conservation in salmon strongholds

In Washington and elsewhere in the West, Tribes, farmers, ranchers, watershed councils and environmental organizations are working cooperatively to explore improved ways of meeting ecological goals by increasing revenue streams to landowners and managers who employ best-practices and good land stewardship. There is regional support and understanding of the importance of keeping working farms and forests “working” so these landscapes can continue to provide important ecosystem services critical to local economies and ecosystems.

Market-based approaches can provide flexibility for regulated entities to find the most cost effective way to meet conservation goals. For example, the Environmental Protection Agency watershed-based permit for the Tualatin River basin in Oregon allows wastewater treatment plants to enter into a trading scheme to achieve the permit requirement for temperature. Instead of installing refrigeration systems at two Tualatin River treatment plants (at a cost of more than \$60 million), a wastewater utility can pay upstream farmers to plant shade trees in the riparian area (at a cost of about \$6 million). Flow augmentation and irrigation with effluent wastewater are also part of the trading. Programs like these, and scores of incentive-programs available to farmers, ranchers and other landowners create a market for ecosystem services (see http://www.fs.fed.us/ecosystemservices/About_ES/faq.shtml).

In December 2008, the U.S. Department of Agriculture established a new “Office of Ecosystem Services and Markets” to implement Section 2709 of the Farm Bill. The Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (the [Farm Bill](#)) took a first step towards facilitating landowner participation in emerging markets for ecosystem services. The Act directs the Secretary of Agriculture, in consultation with other agencies and interests, to establish standards by which to measure the ecosystem services provided by conservation and land management activities. The Environmental Services Board has been established to assist the Secretary. The Board’s guidelines will focus on scientifically rigorous and economically sound methods for quantifying carbon, air and water quality, wetlands, and endangered species benefits in an effort to facilitate the participation of farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners in emerging ecosystem markets.

Watershed scale payment for ecosystems service initiatives are well underway in California, Oregon and Washington, with the support of state, federal, local governments and private landowners. (see www.willamettepartnership.org ; see also www.eartheconomics.org). Some of these projects are inventorying existing programs and building an information clearinghouse, creating a “single-window” means of helping landowners (“sellers”) and investors, (“buyers”), find each other without duplication or heavy transaction costs. Others are more ambitious, seeking to find new sources of funding for well managed forests and farms. Market-based strategies for ecosystem services are one tool in the toolbox of many strategies and actions to accelerate the protection of strongholds. Any projects undertaken by the Stronghold Partners in this area will employ the standards and approaches promulgated by the USDA Environmental Services Board.

Wild salmon ecosystems provide a great opportunity to pilot market-based strategies because:

- 1) Watersheds constitute an ideal “ecological unit” providing clean water, forests, recreation, fish and wildlife and other important ecological services;
- 2) Most western salmon-bearing watersheds have existing federal and state incentive-based programs and private “buyers” of ecosystem services suitable for integration into a coordinated pilot;
- 3) there is often a need to improve coordination and delivery of incentive-based programs in remote rural communities;
- 4) Many of the Federal, State and private organizations engaged in market-based programs are on the Board of the Salmon Stronghold Act.

The Salmon Stronghold Partnership affords an ideal opportunity to work at regional and local levels to design and coordinate a voluntary, market-based approach in one or more strongholds, providing a more convenient, coherent and results-based means of delivering incentive programs to landowners.

A Winning Strategy for Wild Salmon

The Steering Committee and many partners of the Salmon Stronghold Partnership are enthusiastic about increasing our attention on the nation's healthiest wild salmon populations. We all know that prevention will save money, avoiding costly restoration. We also know that success will require the sustained commitment and leadership from a diverse group of public and private interests, whose equal roles must be acknowledged and empowered by our federal government.

The Salmon Stronghold program relies on science and conservation biology principles to identify healthy stronghold populations and high value conservation needs for these populations. While we use science to identify the stronghold populations, the program also requires local buy-in and support. Local stakeholders must choose to "opt-in" to participate in the stronghold program. This is designed to ensure a true partnership between local, state, federal and tribal governments, private landowners, and non-governmental organizations working together to successfully conserve healthy wild Pacific salmon populations.

The Salmon Stronghold Act will demonstrate the federal government's recognition of this shared undertaking and the solid scientific foundation upon which it rests.

I urge you to join me, every West Coast state and a diverse and growing number of local, regional and national organizations in supporting the Pacific Salmon Stronghold Conservation Act of 2009 by passing this bipartisan bill.

THE NATIONAL FISH CONSERVATION ACT WILL HELP FISH EVERYWHERE BY SUPPORTING PUBLIC-PRIVATE EFFORTS TO PROTECT AND RESTORE HABITAT NATIONALLY.

Until now, I have been discussing the particular case of salmon and why we need targeted, specific legislation to complete the picture for this extraordinary anadromous species. Nationally, the time has come for us to focus on a key aspect of our fisheries health – improving and restoring habitat through partnerships or "joint ventures". First successfully employed by the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, this approach leverages public and private resources to support locally developed initiatives designed to protect or restore our nation's fish habitat.

National Fish Habitat Legislation Will Empower Broad Alliances to Protect and Restore Fish Habitat

America's fisheries are facing a conservation crisis. Nearly 40% of North American fishes, 700 species in total, are listed as imperiled. More than two-thirds of these are considered federally threatened or endangered. Habitat alteration is the principal factor in this conservation crisis and is the principal motivation for the development of a National Fish Habitat Action Plan.

The National Fish Habitat Conservation Act will help to coordinate and leverage scientific and conservation capabilities of state and federal agencies, tribes, industry, non-governmental organizations, local communities and other stakeholders to implement voluntary habitat conservation actions and on-the-ground projects.

From the State perspective, the National Fish Habitat Conservation Act will also help to provide the organizational infrastructure and scientific support to create effective partnerships that may span political

boundaries. Western Trout are benefiting from this program now, and Washington is developing a partnership for selected marine and coastal ecosystems.

The Pacific Salmon Stronghold Conservation Act and National Fish Habitat Conservation Act Are Complementary and Compatible.

The National Fish Habitat Conservation Act (NFHCA) provides a good overarching framework for fish habitat protection and the Pacific Salmon Stronghold Conservation Act will complement and support the habitat goals of NFHAP. The Pacific Salmon Stronghold Conservation Act is a necessary component of the existing international and domestic salmon policy “package” and addresses issues beyond habitat. Nevertheless, the two initiatives are complementary and shift the paradigm to recognize and empower the role of non-federal actors in the care and management of our aquatic resources.

Both bills enhance coordination and communication between key stakeholders and provide a good model governance structure to leverage private funding. Both bills will also bring more coherence and consistency to how we protect fish populations, and how we measure the effectiveness of our efforts. The Salmon Stronghold Partnership and National Fish Habitat Initiative will continue to share approaches and information to provide powerful regional models of ecosystem-based conservation programs at the landscape scale. Examples of similar mutually supportive initiatives include: the Bald Eagle Protection Act and North American Waterfowl Management Act; and the Chesapeake Bay Restoration Act and Estuaries and Clean Waters Act of 2000.

I hope that you will support the enactment of both the National Fish Habitat Conservation Act and the Pacific Salmon Stronghold Conservation Act.

On behalf of the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife and the Salmon Stronghold Partnership, I would like to thank you for the invitation to submit testimony and participate in today’s hearing, and for your time in consideration of these issues.