

Congressman Mike Thompson (CA-01)  
Testimony before the House Subcommittee on Insular Affairs, Oceans and Wildlife:  
“Hearing on H.R. 2055 and H.R. 2565”  
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Madam Chair and members of the committee, I'd like to start by thanking Chairwoman Bordallo for convening today's hearing. Rebuilding our fisheries is an important economic and ecological priority, and both the Pacific Salmon Stronghold Conservation Act of 2009 and National Fish Habitat Conservation Act would make significant improvements to conservation programs that are already in place.

- While these bills are compatible and mutually supportive, we absolutely need salmon-specific legislation to ensure the future viability of wild Pacific salmon.

As you know, the freshwater wetlands, rivers and streams in my district represent some of the last and best remaining habitat for wild Pacific salmon, whose populations have seen huge declines over the last few decades.

- These fish are extremely important to the culture, economy and ecosystems in Northern California and throughout the Pacific Northwest. That is why I've introduced the Pacific Salmon Stronghold Conservation Act to protect and restore the healthiest remaining Pacific salmon ecosystems in North America.

The situation is critical for these fish and the families who depend on them for their livelihoods.

- California's wild salmon populations have declined by up to 90% since the 1960s, and two-thirds of Northern California stocks are either threatened or endangered.
- Unfortunately, the problems in our rivers have intensified, making the situation worse for salmon and decimating fisheries in California and Southern Oregon. In 2001, 80,000

adult salmon died on the Klamath River. This was the largest fish kill in the history of the West and mainly due to illegal water plans. The result was the first commercial salmon fishing closure in California and Oregon, which devastated the economic foundation of fishing families.

- A similar, but larger, situation is currently taking place on California's Sacramento River. Because of record low returns of salmon to the Sacramento, California's commercial ocean salmon fishery and recreational salmon fishing season have been closed for two consecutive years. This is unprecedented. Anchorages that used to host hundreds of boats are now empty, and fishing families are being forced to spend the last of their life savings to make up for the lost seasons.

My bill is specifically designed to ensure that wild Pacific salmon populations in healthy ecosystems remain viable and productive far into the future, and to avoid the terrible impacts on fishing families and coastal communities that occur when fish stocks fall to unsustainably low levels.

- This legislation proposes to complement and enhance traditional salmon recovery programs by introducing a somewhat new concept: that we should focus on protecting healthy wild salmon populations so that these salmon stocks never face the risk of extinction.
- And investing in these protection programs on the front end will save the Federal government money over time by avoiding expensive, last-ditch efforts to restore salmon that are nearing extinction.

It is essential that conservation activities are founded in strong science, and my bill would use the best available science to identify watersheds that contain the healthiest repositories of salmon diversity, abundance and productivity.

- Scientists estimate that these salmon strongholds, covering roughly 20% of Pacific salmon habitat, would conserve over half of wild salmon populations in the lower 48 states.

To protect and restore ecosystems within salmon strongholds, this legislation would unite public and private resources in a voluntary, incentive-based partnership to engage local communities. In this approach, partners would prioritize and complete the targeted, high-value conservation actions necessary to keep wild salmon populations healthy.

- One way to do this, and something specifically authorized by the bill, is to expand payments for ecosystem services. Under this system, landowners would be paid for investing in conservation actions that keep an ecosystem healthy.
- Although a more comprehensive concept of paying for ecosystem services is somewhat new, it has been used for years in wetland banking and is being rapidly embraced at NOAA, USDA and elsewhere in the Federal government.

I want to emphasize that the ideas contained in this legislation already have strong bipartisan support from our co-sponsors across the entire five-state range of wild Pacific salmon.

- In addition, local communities have been very supportive of the existing Salmon Stronghold Partnership's incentive-based and scientifically sound program.

- Partners in Canada and Russia are also adopting the stronghold approach, and U.S. leadership will help promote and encourage these efforts.

By authorizing the Partnership and salmon stronghold program, Congress will provide the foundation necessary to keep our wild salmon populations from sliding towards extinction.

- I have here 13 letters of support from state agencies, local governments and private individuals that attest to the need for this legislation, and I ask that these be entered in the record.

In closing, I look forward to working with the committee; state and local governments from across the West; and our non-profit partners to help protect and restore salmon populations.

- I believe that this legislation will help move us in the right direction, towards healthy and fully-functioning ecosystems that will continue to provide the clean water, healthy seafood and vibrant communities on which our fishing families and coastal economy depend.
- I urge the committee to favorably report HR 2055 as soon as possible, and I thank you for the opportunity to testify on the Pacific Salmon Stronghold Conservation Act.