

U.S. Senate passes bill making it easier to kill sea lions

A move to protect salmon runs

By PHUONG LE
Associated Press

SEATTLE — A bill that would make it easier to kill sea lions that feast on imperiled salmon in the Columbia River has cleared the U.S. Senate.

State wildlife managers say rebounding numbers of sea lions are eating more salmon than ever and their appetites are undermining billions of dollars of investments to restore endangered fish runs.

Senate Bill 3119, which passed Thursday by unanimous consent, would streamline the process for Washington state, Idaho, Oregon and several Pacific Northwest Native American tribes to capture and euthanize potentially hundreds of sea lions found in the river east of Portland.

U.S. Sen. Jim Risch, an Idaho Republican who co-sponsored the bill with senators from all three states, said the legislation would help ensure healthy populations of salmon for years to come.

“As endangered salmon face extinction, we must take steps to protect them,” U.S. Sen. Maria Cantwell, a Washington Democrat, said in a statement.

The Senate bill is similar to one passed by the U.S. House in June and sponsored by Reps. Jaime Herrera Beutler, a Washington Republican, Kurt Schrader, an Oregon Democrat, and others.

The House will have to consider the Senate’s bill, or vice versa, before it heads to President Donald Trump for consideration. “We have reason to believe they will by the end of the year,” said Kaylin Minton, communications director for Risch.

Supporters, including the governors of Oregon, Washington state and Idaho, fish-



AP Photo/Don Ryan
A California sea lion that was trapped at Willamette Falls in the lower Willamette River waits to be released into the Pacific Ocean near Newport.

ing groups and tribes, say the bill will give wildlife managers greater flexibility in controlling California sea lions that dramatically increased from about 30,000 in the 1960s to about 300,000 under the 1972 Marine Mammal Protection Act.

Critics called it ill-conceived and say it won’t solve the problem of declining salmon, which also face other problems such as habitat loss and dams.

“This bill changes the core protective nature of the Marine Mammal Protection Act by allowing for the indiscriminate killing of sea lions throughout the Columbia River and its tributaries,” Naomi Rose, marine mammal scientist for the Animal Welfare Institute, said in a statement.

Washington state, Idaho and Oregon wildlife managers have federal authorization to kill problem sea lions that eat salmon in the Columbia River near Bonneville Dam east of Portland.

But they must first go through a lengthy process to identify and document specific sea lions that cause problems, including observing them eating a salmon and using nonlethal hazing measures on them.

Both the House and Senate bills would remove those requirements, so states and several Native American tribes could get a fed-

eral permit to remove any sea lion east of the Interstate 205 bridge that connects Vancouver with Portland, as well as in tributaries of the Columbia River where there are federally protected fish.

Several Native American tribes, including the Yakama Nation, Warm Springs, Umatilla and Nez Perce tribes, also would be granted authority to manage sea lions.

Under both bills, the total number of sea lions removed cannot exceed 10 percent of a specified level, called the potential biological removal. For California sea lions, for example, that limit would be no more than 920 animals.

Nate Pamplin, policy director of Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, said the actual number of animals removed would be much lower because there aren’t that many eligible to be removed.

While there are several thousand California sea lions in the Columbia River estuary, only about 200 to 300 swim more than 100 miles upriver from the Pacific Ocean and would be eligible for removal, state wildlife officials say.

An orca task force convened by Washington Gov. Jay Inslee also backed the legislation to boost the fish for the struggling population of southern resident killer whales.



Washington State Department of Transportation
The interstate bridge connecting Oregon and Washington state.

Lawmakers to discuss replacing I-5 bridge

A meeting is set for Tuesday

By MOLLY SOLOMON
Oregon Public Broadcasting

Oregon lawmakers are ready to return to the table and restart discussions with Washington state to replace the Interstate 5 bridge. In a press release sent out on Friday, state Sen. Annette Cleveland, D-Vancouver, said the meeting “signals a new level of collaboration between the two states.”

The bipartisan group of lawmakers will meet for the first time at 2 p.m. Tuesday at the Oregon Association of Minority Entrepreneurs in Portland. The Joint Oregon-Washington Legislative Action Committee was created last year in the Washington Legislature.

“We all agree on the overdue need for a new bridge and a process that maintains the public’s trust and support,” Cleveland wrote in a statement, thanking her Oregon counterparts for participating in next week’s meeting. “I’m not going to suggest this undertaking will be simple or easy, but we are determined to find a path that leads us to a solution in order to build the much-

needed replacement bridge.” In 2013, Republican lawmakers from southwest Washington walked away from the Columbia River Crossing project, effectively killing the last attempt to replace the I-5 bridge. The project would have replaced the century-old bridge across the Columbia River and extended light rail into Vancouver.

Since then, Oregon has been wary about resuming talks of a new bridge.

“I want to know what they have to say this time around,” said state Sen. Cliff Bentz, R-Ontario, one of five Oregon lawmakers who have agreed to be on the committee. “And why we should trust this process.”

Lawmakers from both states agree that a new bridge is long overdue, and point to increased traffic congestion and concerns over safety in the event of a large earthquake.

“There’s a lot at stake here and I think everyone recognizes that,” said state Sen. Ann Rivers, R-La Center.

Rivers, a previous opponent of the Columbia River Crossing project, says she now supports a replacement bridge. “So many people in Washington state actually work in Oregon,” she said. “For their quality of life, this

is an investment that has to be made.”

In an Oct. 1 letter to Oregon’s transportation committee co-chairs, House Speaker Tina Kotek and Senate President Peter Courtney said they welcomed restarting discussions about replacing the I-5 bridge.

“Oregon has a long history of leadership in pursuing a replacement project,” Kotek and Courtney wrote. “Now is the time for a bipartisan group of Oregon legislators to re-engage with our colleagues in Washington to pursue congestion relief and ensure structural security between our two states.”

Recently, several local governments, including Vancouver, Clark County and local ports, have passed resolutions supporting a bridge replacement.

Washington lawmakers include Sens. Cleveland, Rivers, Lynda Wilson, R-Vancouver, and Steve Hobbs, D-Lake Stevens; and Reps. Sharon Wylie, D-Vancouver, Brandon Vick, R-Felida, Jake Fey, D-Tacoma, and Ed Orcutt, R-Kalama.

Oregon’s delegation includes Sens. Bentz, Lee Beyer, D-Springfield, and Brian Boquist, R-Dallas; and Reps. Caddy McKeown, D-Coos Bay, and Susan McLain, D-Hillsboro.

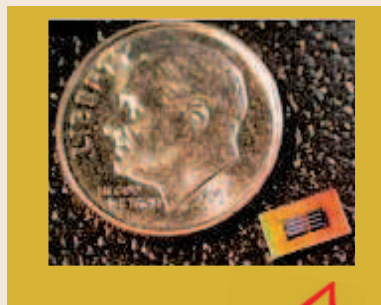
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