



NATIONAL CONGRESS OF AMERICAN INDIANS

July 31, 2018

Chairman John Thune
U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce,
Science and Transportation
Washington, DC 20510

Ranking Member Bill Nelson
U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce,
Science and Transportation
Washington, DC 20510

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Tlingit

NCAI HEADQUARTERS
1516 P Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20005
202.466.7767
202.466.7797 fax
www.ncai.org

Re: Support for S. 3119, the Endangered Salmon Predation Prevention Act

Dear Ranking Member Nelson and Chairman Thune:

I write on behalf of the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI), the oldest and largest organization advocating for the interests of tribal governments. The Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation is scheduled to markup S. 3119, the Endangered Salmon Predation Prevention Act. NCAI writes to support this bi-partisan legislation introduced by Senators Jim Risch and Maria Cantwell.

S. 3119 is essential to protect salmon, steelhead, and sturgeon from predatory sea lions. Recently, sea lions have learned to swim over 100 miles up the Columbia River to various choke points where salmon and other species must pass. At these choke points, sea lions gorge on salmon, steelhead, and sturgeon. Evidence suggests this is learned behavior by a limited number of animals. Despite their small numbers, these sea lions can have devastating effects. In 2014, the National Marine Fisheries Service observed that predatory sea lions prevented as many as 43% of all Chinook salmon entering the Columbia River from reaching their spawning grounds. Biologists from the state of Oregon also indicate there is a 90% chance that steelhead on the Willamette River will go extinct if predatory sea lions continue unabated.

The states of Oregon, Washington and Idaho together with the Yakama, the Umatilla, the Warm Springs and the Nez Perce Tribes have urged Congress to enact legislation allowing the removal of small numbers of sea lions going far upriver. The Supreme Court has recognized, "to these Indians, salmon were no less important than the atmosphere they breathed." *United States v. Winans*, 198 U.S. 371 at 381 (1905). S. 3119 ensures the humane removal of predatory sea lions, the protection of important fish, and supports the Tribes' cultural survival.

NCAI urges the Committee to vote in favor of passing S. 3119, the Endangered Salmon Predation Prevention Act. Thank you for your consideration of this matter, and we look forward to working with you on this and other issues.

Sincerely,

Jacqueline Pata
NCAI Executive Director