



## Proposal would curb Columbia River gillnetters

3/26/2009, 3:10 p.m. PT

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PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — Proposed legislation that would curb gillnetting on the lower Columbia River is picking at a sore point that has divided commercial and sport fishermen on the river for decades.

Backers say it is a win-win deal for sports and commercial fishermen. Some gillnetters say they wonder if they'll stay in business if it passes.

Gillnetting involves using long nets spread across the river to ensnare fish. Sport fishermen can't use it, and it's the only legal form of commercial fishing on the river.

One bill would ban it on the main river below Bonneville Dam and move it into predetermined zones such as tributaries to increase the take of hatchery fish over federally protected species.

Another would ban nets on the river entirely.

With Washington not bound by Oregon laws, the potential effect of the bills is not clear. Pat Patillo of the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife said Thursday it could be "just a mess."

Consistent regulations, he said, is a goal of a fisheries compact between the states. While there are allocations between the sports and commercial fisheries, he said there are none between the states, so Washington fishermen probably could take fish no longer available to their Oregon counterparts.

Astoria resident Bruce Buckmaster, former owner of a fish food plant and a member of the commercial fishing group Salmon For All, told the Daily Astorian that the bill asks gillnetters to give up long-standing rights without an equivalent sacrifice from sport-fishers.

State Rep. Scott Bruun, R-West Linn, a sponsor of the bill, said Thursday that the practices of the past century are unsustainable. "If we don't do this we lose gillnetting," he said.

Bruun said gillnetting does not differentiate among hatchery fish, wild, protected species, and sturgeon.

"It takes whatever fish is in its way," he said. "The mortality of non-hatchery fish is high with gillnetting. With sports fishing it is really very low."

"Sports fishermen are seeing the dollars they pay go up every year and their time on the river and their portion of the fish go down," he said.

He said gillnetting has been banned on other major river systems. "We want to sustain gillnetting, and the only way to really do that is to put it off in safer areas."

The proposal, he said, could mean more fish for gillnetters "although they might not believe it."

One who doesn't is Richard Quashnick, 75, of Warrenton, a gillnetter on the river for 55 years.

"It would really hurt us," he said Thursday.

"My family's in the business. My sons have been fishing for 35 years. I have grandkids with boats. They might as well burn them if they won't let us fish in the river."

He said the fight has gone on for years.

"We're not wealthy enough to fight it," he said. "We've had to fight it before."

He said he couldn't believe the Legislature would let the bill pass.

"The charter boats are behind trying to get rid of us," he said. "In their mind they'll get a lot more fish if they get rid of us. They're just as commercial as we are."

Steve Williams, assistant administrator of the fish division of the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, said the gillnetters already fish both the main stream and the tributaries.

"The challenge will be in the intent to replace the catch from the main stream," he said. "It is likely we will have to increase the release of hatchery fish in those areas to do that. It's not clear if that would work or not."

He said sports and commercial fishermen are supposed to keep only hatchery fish, identifiable by a clipped fin, but there's a high mortality rate in the accidental catch known as bycatch.

He said his agency has taken no position on the bill but that limiting gillnetting to tributaries and other defined areas should reduce the percentage of listed salmon in the commercial catch.

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