

Guest Column: Pair of bills undermine critical protections for salmon and tens of thousands of jobs

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A pair of bills introduced in the House of Representatives, H.R. 872 and H.R. 215, would have devastating impacts on California and Oregon's already beleaguered salmon populations, natural resources, and tens of thousands of jobs, as well as on the cultural heritage and traditional way of life of Native American Tribes.

H.R. 872, the so-called FISH Act introduced by Representative Calvert (R-CA), would eliminate the National Marine Fisheries Service's (NMFS) Endangered Species Act authority over salmon and other anadromous species by transferring that management to the Secretary of the Interior.

This type of switch was done during the Trump Administration because NMFS refused to sign off on water rules that granted massive water increases to San Joaquin Valley agriculture at the expense of

salmon. The Trump rules, largely still in place today, have resulted in salmon stocks being driven into steep decline and the closure of state waters to salmon fishing and massive job losses.

H.R. 215, introduced by Representative Valadao (R-CA), seeks to preempt state law and undermine the vital protections for salmon and other fish and wildlife that people depend on. The bill would eliminate critical environmental reviews for proposed water projects, including those that would divert or impound water, and remove the authority of state agencies to manage their own waters. By locking in water operation rules forced on California by the Trump Administration, which are the subject of current legal challenges, H.R. 215 would further harm salmon by raising Shasta Dam. Raising the dam would reduce or eliminate needed periodic flushing flows in the upper Sacramento Basin that are beneficial to the entire Sacramento Basin ecosystem and the Delta. Additionally, the bill would let the big agricultural corporations that promised to pay for the damage done to fish and wildlife by the federal water project walk away from their commitment to pay for the damage.

"H.R. 872 is a dangerous piece of legislation that would undermine the Endangered Species Act and put salmon populations at risk," said Scott Artis, executive director of Golden State Salmon Association. "The National Marine Fisheries Service has been an important partner in the management and recovery of endangered salmon populations for decades. Eliminating their role in managing these critical species would be a grave mistake."

Salmon are an iconic and keystone species that play a vital role in the ecosystems of California, Oregon and the Pacific Northwest. Salmon are a crucial component of the culture, diet, jobs and businesses of people across California and the Pacific Northwest, which are all under threat due to declining fish populations and essential to the survival of many wildlife species, including orcas. Furthermore, salmon are important to the region's economy, exceeding \$2 billion annually and supporting more than 30,000 jobs in California and Oregon.

"H.R. 215 is a movie we've seen before during the Trump Administration. The Trump water rules Rep. Valadao seeks to enshrine have denied salmon the water they need, resulting in a closed salmon season this year and massive job loss," said John McManus, senior policy director of Golden State Salmon Association. "This bill is a blatant attempt to ensure that salmon are driven extinct in order to deliver more water to Mr. Valadao's constituents in the San Joaquin Valley."

"By removing the safeguards in place to protect our rivers, streams, and other waterways, H.R. 215 would open the door to overuse, pollution, and degradation of our most precious natural resources," said Artis. "As for H.R. 872, the Endangered Species Act has been critical in the recovery of salmon populations and this bill would roll back the progress made. It is time for lawmakers to stand up for the Endangered Species Act, our waterways, and the communities that depend on them. The future of these species depends on it."

Golden State Salmon Association is urging Congress to reject H.R. 215 and H.R. 872 to protect critical salmon habitat, cultural heritage, jobs, and the economy.

Golden State Salmon Association (www.goldenstatesalmon.org) is a coalition of salmon advocates that includes commercial and recreational salmon fishermen and women, businesses, restaurants, a native tribe, environmentalists, elected officials, families and communities that rely on salmon. GSSA's mission is to restore California salmon for their economic, recreational, commercial, environmental, cultural and health values.