



September 7, 2017

The Honorable Jay Inslee
Office of the Governor
Washington State Capital Building
416 14th Ave SW
Olympia, WA 98504

Dear Governor Inslee,

The Sierra Club nationally is 3 million strong and has 100,000+ members in Washington State. The mission of Sierra Club is "To practice and promote the responsible use of the earth's ecosystems and resources."

The Sierra Club is extremely concerned about the recent spill of several thousand non-native Atlantic salmon into Puget Sound from a crumpled structure near Cypress Island. Escaped Atlantic salmon are being caught hundreds of miles away from the site and swimming into wild salmon spawning rivers throughout the region.

This accident was initially reported by Lummi fishermen harvesting wild salmon returning to local rivers. It was not reported by the multinational conglomerate Cooke Aquaculture, owner of the salmon farms in our state. The company issued a series of erroneous statements, blaming a solar eclipse that occurred several days later and high tides that were not unusual for the date or location.

This type of open water net pen has proven worldwide to be incapable of confining salmon. They function as reservoirs, amplifying parasites and pathogens that infect other fish, birds and marine mammals, which also can be snared in the nets. Our native salmon, marine and coastal ecosystem, fishing economies and cultures must be protected from devastation of this type that could be avoided if production sites were on land.

International scientists such as John Volpe and Alexandra Morton and locally, University of Washington Zoologist Dr. Arthur Whiteley have reported for more than 20 years that marine feedlots endanger wild salmon and other marine life through transmission of diseases, parasites, voluminous flushing of pollution impairing water quality, and damaged bottom lands. Even though more than 613,000 Atlantic salmon escaped in 4 years into our state waters from 1996-1999 and ongoing "leakage" is a known problem, companies have been allowed to continue rearing millions of these invasive species in mesh sided marine operations.

Atlantic salmon compete with native salmon for territory and food and disrupt the natural spawning behavior of wild salmon. West Coast rivers, including in our state, are not monitored appropriately to determine how many non-native fish are present and whether they are reproducing. Populations of

colonizing Atlantic salmon have been found in BC rivers by Dr. John Volpe. We also need to be diligent in surveying our rivers.

Cooke Aquaculture is proposing a new, massive Atlantic salmon fish farm operation in the Strait of Juan de Fuca. This is the migration route of the majority of our native salmon, endangered mammals such as the dwindling populations of Orcas and sea birds -- such as the Marbled Murrelet. It is also very near the USFWS Dungeness Refuge (the "Spit."). We are very concerned that these pens would interfere with the feeding, breeding and movement of resident and migratory wild life. Since the removal of dams on the Elwha Rivers, our state has been applauded for bringing back wild salmon populations. Placing this population at risk by allowing pens of carnivorous fish in the pathway of out-migrating juvenile salmon and returning adults is easily remedied by simply requiring fish feedlots to be on land or closed containment systems.

Governor Inslee, citizens of our state must be assured that a thorough investigation will be undertaken.

You have stated, "Tribes and others who fish Washington waters deserve a comprehensive response to this incident, including answers to what happened and assurances that it won't happen again." We agree with this, but history of this industry has taught us that such assurance cannot be made. The precautionary principle is certainly called for in this case. Indeed, it is long overdue.

We urge you to guarantee that no new salmon net pens will be allowed in our waters, and that leases on existing operations will not be renewed. We need to join Alaska, Oregon and California in protecting native pacific salmon and banning production of this invasive species in marine waters.

Since some of our members have researched and written about the risks of marine feedlots since the mid-1990s and have compiled extensive information on the subject, we will send relevant links of articles and studies to your office and to the appropriate regulatory agencies. We would appreciate being informed of your decisions since we believe we share a mutually deep commitment to protecting resources in our state for future generations.

Respectfully,

Stephanie Hillman
Northwest Campaign Representative, Sierra Club