

Restoring Oregon's Coho Salmon—and Healthy Streams

The Problem

The run of coho salmon was once bountiful along Oregon's coast. At the turn of the century, coastal coho salmon north of Cape Blanco numbered about 1.25 million adults. From that time through the 1930s, the figure was 900,000. Then annual production declined to about 450,000 in the 1940s and 1950s. In recent years, the annual figure for wild coho in the state's coastal basins has dropped to between 50,000 and 80,000. The cause of the decline was, as a state report put it, "human activities." In 1996, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) proposed listing two groups of coho salmon in Oregon as threatened under the Endangered Species Act.



Such action would place sanctions on commercial or sports fishermen who caught the salmon. But agricultural and timber interests were the ones most threatened by proposed federal listing. Their upstream actions may affect coho habitat and spawning routes.

Oregon's response was to attempt to develop and fund a salmon recovery plan that satisfied the fisheries agency before it made a final decision to add the salmon to the endangered species list.

The Process

To get things moving, Governor John Kitzhaber summoned his natural resource agency heads to begin a planning process and assemble key stakeholders to deal with the coastal salmon issue. The stakeholders included sportsmen, commercial fishermen, timber and agricultural interests, public and private agencies, and, not least, conservationists.

Governor Kitzhaber assumed a role that was not traditional for most governors. He acted as convener and mediator. On and off over a six-month period, he met both individually and collectively with stakeholders, sometimes relaying messages back and forth, sometimes facilitating group sessions.

The process led to agreement on a plan—designated the Oregon Coastal Salmon Restoration Initiative. But another environmental factor entered into the equation that eventually melded the salmon plan with a clean water initiative.

At about the same time that the federal government proposed action on salmon, issues surrounding the federal Clean Water Act were coalescing. A total of 870 stream segments in Oregon did not meet water quality standards. In addition, several environmental groups sought a ballot measure that would phase in fencing to exclude livestock in watershed areas.

Once again, the governor convened parties ranging from agricultural and timber interests to environmental organizations to deal with the water issues. The result was the Healthy Streams Partnership Agreement.

During the next year and a half, government agencies worked with stakeholders to develop measures that would restore the coho salmon and improve water quality statewide. In 1997, the legislature provided \$30 million to help pay for the measures. Among other things, the money went to watershed councils, soil and water conservation districts, landowners, and others to enhance watersheds.



I use consensus process to resolve public policy problems simply because it works. The complex nature of issues today requires an integrated collaborative approach to ensure sound lasting solutions.

*Governor John A. Kitzhaber,
M.D., of Oregon*

In the end, the Healthy Streams Partnership and the coho restoration plan were merged into the Oregon Plan for Salmon and Watersheds.

The Result

The National Marine Fisheries Service took notice of the Oregon Plan's measures and funding and decided not to add coho on the Oregon coast to the endangered species list. It did list as endangered the salmon in a coastal area that Oregon shares with California, mainly, according to Oregon officials, because California did not develop a recovery plan for its part of the shared area.

As to long-term results, it is too early to say if the coho salmon will come back in abundant numbers.



Utilizing Alternative Dispute Resolution within Maryland's judiciary and state agencies will enable cases to be solved earlier with less cost and, more important, without the animosity that litigation so often produces. (Maryland's Commission on the Future of the Courts found that) agreements reached through ADR tend to hold up better in terms of compliance than do judgments imposed by courts on disgruntled litigants.

*Governor Parris N.
Glendening of Maryland*