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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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## **NOAA Fisheries Names Panel to Examine Salmon-Eating Sea Lion Activities at Bonneville Dam**

NOAA Fisheries Service's Northwest regional office in Seattle has appointed an 18-person panel of experts to review a request from three Northwest states for permission to lethally remove California sea lions that are eating threatened and endangered salmon and steelhead just below Bonneville Dam on the Columbia River.

Washington, Oregon and Idaho submitted the request in a letter to NOAA Fisheries Service last November, following substantial predation by California sea lions on spring Chinook and other salmonids below Bonneville Dam earlier that year. The law that protects seals and sea lions – the Marine Mammal Protection Act – has a provision for such requests. It calls for NOAA Fisheries Service to create a panel to review the request and make a recommendation to the agency.

The salmon and steelhead being eaten by the sea lions are listed under the federal Endangered Species Act.

Less than a decade ago sea lion predation on returning adult salmon at Bonneville was rare. However, in recent years it has increased at an alarming rate. Close to 100 sea lions were seen feeding at Bonneville this year with more than 50 observed eating adult salmon and steelhead on a single day. Agency biologists estimate that sea lions took about 3,500 fish this year, about four percent of the returning spawning population and the highest ever recorded.

Steller sea lions, larger cousins of California sea lions, have also been seen eating adult white sturgeon at the dam as the fish head upriver to spawn. No Steller sea lions will be killed. They are considered a depleted species under the MMPA. Bonneville Dam is 145 miles from the mouth of the Columbia.

NOAA Fisheries Service said that efforts to deter sea lions with firecrackers and rubber buckshot had proven ineffective, although the agency said such actions had been effective in deterring Stellers from eating sturgeon, with no documented predation once deterrence efforts began in earnest at the end of February.

The review panel, known formally as the *Pinniped-Fishery Interaction Task Force*, will hold its first meeting in Portland Sept. 4, and will make a recommendation to NOAA Fisheries Service within 60 days of that meeting. NOAA expects to make a decision about granting the states' request by next March.

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The panel's members come from government agencies, conservation organizations, Indian Tribes and science and fishing associations.

For a list of the panel members and their affiliations, see the Web at:  
<http://www.nwr.noaa.gov/Marine-Mammals/Seals-and-Sea-Lions/Sec-120-TF.cfm>.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, an agency of the U.S. Commerce Department, is celebrating 200 years of science and service to the nation. From the establishment of the Survey of the Coast in 1807 by Thomas Jefferson to the formation of the Weather Bureau and the Commission of Fish and Fisheries in the 1870s, much of America's scientific heritage is rooted in NOAA.

NOAA is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and information service delivery for transportation, and by providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources. Through the emerging Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), NOAA is working with its federal partners, more than 70 countries and the European Commission to develop a global monitoring network that is as integrated as the planet it observes, predicts and protects.

NOAA Fisheries Service is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation's living marine resources and their habitat through scientific research, management and enforcement. NOAA Fisheries Service provides effective stewardship of these resources for the benefit of the nation, supporting coastal communities that depend upon them, and helping to provide safe and healthy seafood to consumers and recreational opportunities for the American public. To learn more about NOAA Fisheries Service, please visit: [www.nmfs.noaa.gov](http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov).

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