**NWFA /CELP ‘Lobby Day’ Report, Olympia, WA 03/19/2019**

NWFA was invited by the Center for Environmental Law and Policy (CELP) to participate in Water Lobby Day in Olympia. CELP is working with a loose knit coalition of fishers, environmentalists and activists concerned with mismanagement of Washington state water resources and its implications for salmon and orcas. Wytold Lebing and Alan Pilkington joined a group of about fifteen individuals on March 19.’

‘Water Lobby Day’ allowed our group to serve as lobbyists on behalf of our water resources. The day allowed Washington State Representatives and Senators to hear our views about water issues and provide input about the individual’s and group’s concerns. Included in the group were two fishermen’s clubs (NWFA and a Vancouver, WA fly anglers club), a water scientist/environmentalist, an environmental lobbyist, an environmental attorney, 2 League of Women’s Voters reps and a concerned private citizen.

The overarching concern of the group is that over appropriation of state water resources and climate change has created a crisis requiring bold action, now, to recover our streams for the salmon, orcas, and people that depend on them.

CELP briefed the group on current Washington water issues being addressed by legislators. Several key state legislators had been selected (by CELP) for group meetings, and the CELP group was divided into smaller groups of 2-6 individuals for meetings with the individual congressmen.

Important background facts:

1. Washington state streamflows are becoming too low to support salmon, orcas and increasing demands of communities.

2. As WA DOT was busy building roads little concern was paid to the needs of salmon. Hundreds of poorly installed culverts block a thousand miles of spawning streams.

3. Historically, Washington state has over appropriated water leading to conflict among users. Because water claims date back to hand written notes from the 1800’s, who has actually retains the rights to the state’s water is confusing and contentious. Additionally, the water resources, aquifers. and snow melt, available for the future has never been completely catalogued.

4. As climate change exacerbates these issues, water scarcity and low summer flows will pose serious threats to our resources and wildlife.

Relevant to this, there are three major issues before the legislators:

1. Implementing the Orca Task Force recommendations. Adult orcas need about 325 pounds of Chinook and Coho salmon to meet their daily energy requirements; critical stream habitat for these threatened species is quickly disappearing largely due to unregulated water withdrawals. Proposed new legislation involves enforcing current stream Inflow regulations (not currently being enforced equitably, evenly or aggressively enough) and adjudicating sate water rights, which are archaic, confused and not fully recorded let alone equitably implemented. Orcas are considered an umbrella (or ‘keystone’) species, whereby maintaining their healthy environment maintains healthy environments for other species like salmonoids. They are also popular, and legislators say they also provide an umbrella for political action.

2. Replacing Culverts. There are about 800 culverts in Washington State blocking about 1000 miles of streams, inhibiting fish passage and returns. Federal 9th circuit court has ordered these culverts be replaced in 17 years (a year ago). Washington state must find funding for these replacements. Without clear water passage there can be no spawning on those streams and salmon are the principal food source of WA waters orcas. Studies show salmon will return upstream within days or weeks after culvert replacement when spawning begins.

3. Water Appliance Efficiency Standards. This relates to establishing efficiency standards for water use (eg. water appliances, toilets, etc.) in new buildings. The state is witnessing significant economic and population growth, and these measures are considered critical to be able to provide water for that expansion, at a manageable consumer cost. This is a commonsense bill that is almost universally supported.

With this background, we (Wytold and Alan), and others, met with three legislators:

1. Joe Fitzgibbons (Representative, 34th district). Chairman, Environment Committee. Definitely a friend of the environment. He supports funding Inflow Enforcement. Stated that adjudication of WA water is necessary. We will have increasing water problems as climate change reduces snow pack, and adjudication will help with understanding which water projects will have high value. He feels that a small gas tax is the way to fund culvert replacement. He mentioned that a gas tax is tricky because once you open it up - everybody has a pet highway project that they want to add. He says that probably without a tax it’s unlikely that any funding will be in the budget. He mentioned that the best way for CELP to assist is promoting public awareness of the culvert situation. In general, he said he prefers a total eco-system recovery strategy rather than more limited initiatives, eg. trees. He also mentioned that he supports an end to gold dredging.

2. Lauren Davis (Freshman Representative, 32nd district). A junior member of the Capital Budgeting Committee. She is aware of the culvert issue, says that it is a priority, and says that it is possible that there may be capital funding available. (I believe that she said her Senate counterpart Jesse Salomon was pushing for Capital for culverts). She was quite open to listening to us. She will likely be a friend on environmental issues.

3. Sharon Wylie (Representative, 49th district). She definitely supports most environmental causes and is strong on orcas and river improvements. She noted Japanese knot weeds as being a river problem She is also is pragmatic about compromise. She feels that on culverts it should be a shared responsibility of Transportation and Capital Budgets. We asked what we can do to help? She said she believed that fixing major WA environmental issues will require compromises on all sides, and one of the best things we could do is start finding corporations that are willing to work with us, and not turn environmental matters into a battle between corporations and concerned citizens.

Some thoughts/notes for NWFA Members:

 1. Some legislators seem well informed on environmental issues that affect them but will respond to reinforcement and support from their voters and electorate on these issues. They seemed to welcome CELP’s engagement and support. Establishing a dialog and being proactive will help our rivers and water.

2. There is still strong, organized opposition to what we may see as obviously important issues, and priorities are different, even among well-meaning legislators, plus WA state financial resources are not infinite. So making our voices heard is important.

3. With the environment looming as a more and more important issue, especially with climate change and its threats to the waters our fly fishing avocation and sport needs, the NWFA needs an active conservation voice.

We both enjoyed the day. By meeting face to face with legislators we were standing up for the water resources, fish, and wildlife. Many of us send emails, make calls, sign petitions. Which is great and we should continue to do so. This was different. This was a chance to look our representatives directly in the eye and tell them our side of the story. It was also valuable to learn about the ‘process’ of getting protections in place and learning about competing interests. Quite frankly it felt rewarding and empowering.

Submitted by: Alan Pilkington and Wytold Lebing