

Statement by Senator Maria Cantwell
Introduction of the Pacific Salmon Stronghold Conservation Act of 2009
April 2, 2009

PACIFIC SALMON STRONGHOLD CONSERVATION ACT OF 2009

Mr. President, I rise today to introduce the Pacific Salmon Stronghold Conservation Act of 2009, together with my colleague from Alaska Senator Murkowski. I am grateful for all the input and collaboration from key stakeholders in Washington state that I have received on this legislation. I am especially grateful for the input from the Quileute Tribe, the Wild Salmon Center, and Bill Ruckelshaus.

Wild Pacific salmon are central to the culture, economy, and environment of western North America. While current Federal, state, and local salmon recovery efforts are focused on recovering salmon listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) – seeking to restore what we’ve lost – the Salmon Stronghold Act seeks to protect what we have. Current efforts to recover threatened or endangered salmon stocks are vital. This is why I have consistently fought for increased funding for the Pacific Coast Salmon Recovery Fund (PCSRF) and will continue to proudly do so.

The PCSRF, since its inception in 2000, has allowed my home state of Washington to focus the efforts of counties and conservation districts, on average, to remove 300 barriers to fish passage and to open 300 miles of habitat each year. That’s 2,400 barriers removed and 2,400 miles of habitat restored. In 2008, for every federal dollar spent on this program it leveraged about \$2 local and state dollars.

I will continue the fight to protect this salmon recovery funding. But more must be done. A key purpose of this Act is to complement existing federal, state and local salmon recovery efforts by directing new federal resources to conserve healthy salmon populations. This legislation will utilize sound science to identify and sustain core centers of salmon abundance, productivity, and diversity in the healthiest remaining salmon ecosystems throughout the Pacific states.

This bill establishes a new regional Salmon Stronghold Partnership program that provides federal support and resources to protect a network of the healthiest remaining wild Pacific salmon ecosystems in North America. The bill promotes enhanced coordination and cooperation of federal, tribal, state and local governments, public and private land managers, fisheries managers, power authorities, and non-governmental organizations in efforts to protect salmon strongholds.

It is time to increase funding for recovery efforts, but also focus on prevention. And it is time to adopt the kind of comprehensive solution that can solidify the place wild Pacific salmon hold in American culture for generations to come.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the text of the bill be printed in the record.