The Oregonian

Washington senator proposes "salmon strongholds"

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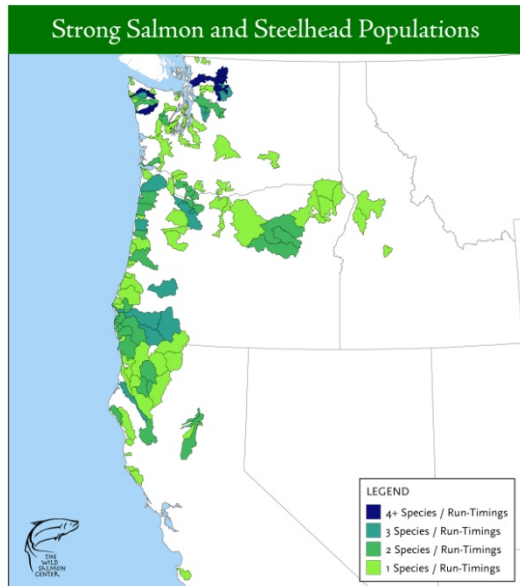
by Matthew Preusch, The Oregonian

A new bill seeks to protect "salmon strongholds" like the Sandy River where there are relatively healthy fish runs. *Brent Wojahn/The Oregonian*

A Northwest senator is introducing a bill today intended to protect the region's healthiest salmon populations.

Sen. Maria Cantwell (D-WA) is proposing a "salmon strongholds" program meant to complement the many years and many billions of dollars spent trying to recover the most threatened fish runs.

"This represents the third leg in the stool in what we think is a more comprehensive and holistic approach to salmon conservation," said Greg Block, vice president of conservation at Portland's Wild Salmon Center.

The other two legs, Block said, are the Endangered Species Act, which focuses on depleted salmon runs; and the Pacific Salmon Treaty, which deals with inter-boundary issues.
The bill's sponsors say such strongholds cover about 20 percent of the range of Pacific salmon in the lower 48 states but account for half of all salmon abundance.

Strong Salmon and Steelhead Populations

LEGEND
- 4+ Species / Run-Timings
- 3 Species / Run-Timings
- 2 Species / Run-Timings
- 1 Species / Run-Timings

NORTH AMERICAN
Salmon Stronghold
PARTNERSHIP

The shading on this map represents places where salmon and steelhead species remain strong according to three criteria: abundance and productivity, percent natural origin spawners, and life history diversity. Abundance and productivity are weighted twice as high as the other two criteria. This map was developed using population scale data that were gathered through an expert opinion process in 2007 and 2008.

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In the Oregon, basins like the Sandy and Illinois are considered places where there are relatively healthy runs of fish.

Under the program proposed in the bill, local, state and federal groups would work along with the private sector to identify the healthy runs; review how they are being supported; then use private and taxpayer money to design and implement conservation strategies.

The bill includes an annual authorization of up to $30 million in taxpayer money.

Some of that money would go towards incentives for the voluntary involvement of the private sector, such as payments to landowners in select basins who manage their property in more salmon-friendly ways, said Block.

The U.S. House of Representatives is scheduled to introduce their version of the bill when congress returns from recess later this month.

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