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Editorial

Put science over fishy politics

Washington Sen. Patty Murray needs to rescue the Fish Passage Center, which provides independent analysis of salmon migration and survival on the Columbia and Snake rivers.

Murray sits on the conference committee of the energy and water appropriations bill, and has the best chance to restore the center's minuscule \$1.3 million budget that Idaho Sen. Larry Craig wants eliminated. His attempt to silence an authoritative voice has been roundly condemned by Western governors, regional House members, the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians and directors of state fish and wildlife departments.

The federal government is spending hundreds of millions of dollars on salmon-recovery efforts, and taxpayers ought to be outraged by backroom politics to prevent those efforts from being guided by the best available science.

Critics simply do not like the Fish Passage Center's unvarnished findings, and they seem to resent that the information is available to the public via the Internet. The data has turned up in successful lawsuits challenging the federal government's stewardship of salmon recovery.

The center and its staff, located in Portland, are a powerful scientific tool created in the early years of the 1980 Northwest Power Planning Act to gather, organize and analyze research data for federal, state and tribal fisheries managers.

The center is financed by the Bonneville Power Administration through the Northwest Power and Conservation Council. The center has sailed through audits of its practices and findings with full confidence and renewed funding.

Craig's backdoor bureaucratic assault is not even supported by his Idaho colleague and fellow Republican, Sen. Mike Crapo.

Eliminating the good work of the Fish Passage Center will not make salmon recovery any more accurate or less expensive. Murray sits at the table where this nonsense should be stopped.

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