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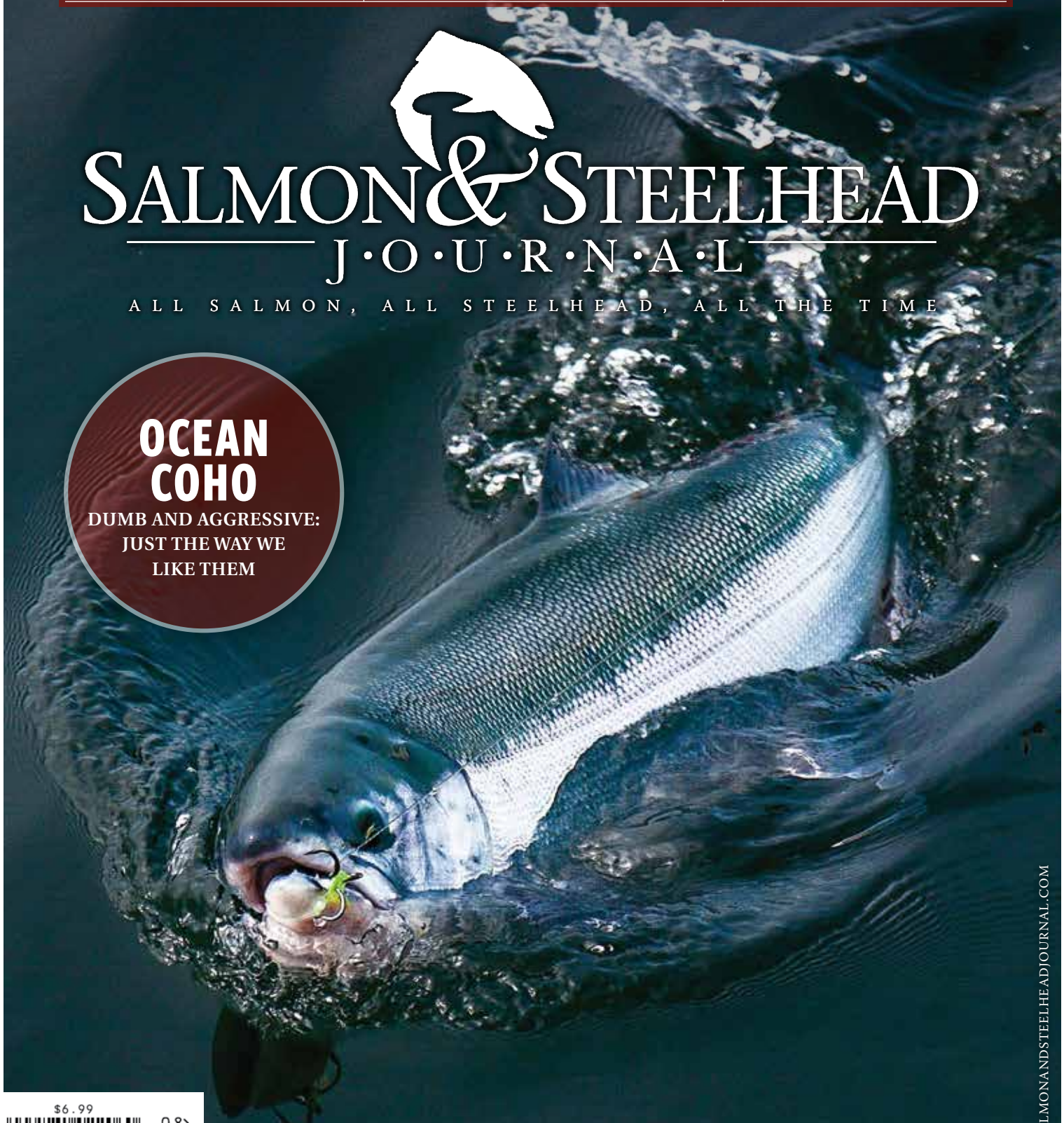
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# Solving the Salmon Recovery Riddle Is Not Easy

By DANIELLE CLOUTIER, PhD *and* DAN MCDONALD

**As the nation's leading association** representing the sportfishing industry, the American Sportfishing Association (ASA) advocates for a wide range of federal, regional and state conservation policies. But arguably none are more complicated than those related to Pacific salmon. When it comes to Pacific salmon, the web of intersecting policies and jurisdictional oversight is intricately woven and highly complex — federal vs. state vs. tribal management jurisdictions, barriers to fish passage, harvest levels, gear conflicts, marine mammal predation and related laws, climate change policy, hatcheries, water and power management, the Endangered Species Act, and more. With so many complicated factors that make change from status quo difficult to achieve, it may appear that nothing is being done to restore threatened salmon and steelhead runs. However, while we have much work to do, it's important to recognize progress where it's occurring.

Throughout the past decade, the federal government has spent over \$17 billion in salmon conservation through various programs. Yet sea lions are eating more salmon than ever, and their appetites are undermining billions of dollars in federal investments to restore endangered fish runs.

Despite a contentious political landscape, Senator Maria Cantwell (D-Wash.) led an effort to pass the Endangered Salmon Predation Prevention Act, streamlining the process for Washington, Idaho, Oregon and several Pacific Northwest Native

American tribes to capture and euthanize potentially hundreds of sea lions. More recently, Sen. Cantwell teamed up with Rep. Derek Kilmer (D-Wash.) to advance a provision as part of ongoing infrastructure legislation to offer much-needed modernization of the nation's culverts. Our nation's waterways have become increasingly fragmented by in-stream manmade structures, such as culverts, that frequently restrict or completely block fish passage. According to a Government Accountability Office study, it has been estimated that efforts to restore fish passage may ultimately cost hundreds of millions just on federal lands in Oregon and Washington alone, and will take decades to accomplish. The advocacy of the Pacific Northwest Congressional delegation for the "National Culvert Removal, Replacement, and Restoration Grant Program" within the surface transportation bill will provide 4 billion dollars investment to improve these problematic structures. While not law yet, the culvert program is well positioned to be included in the infrastructure package that Congress continues to debate.

The work Sen. Cantwell and her colleagues in Congress have been able to accomplish undoubtedly will improve conditions for salmon runs. Nevertheless, it's important to recognize that in the long-term, addressing dams, the proverbial elephant in the room, is going to be critical. We commend Rep. Mike Simpson (R-Idaho) for his dedication and leadership in developing his Columbia Basin Initiative. While

we understand that not all members of the delegation are ready to endorse the proposal as a whole, we urge them to come together to work toward immediate and long-term solutions. As Rep. Simpson says, "if you've got alternatives that will work, let me know." His pragmatic approach to this complicated issue will hopefully encourage his colleagues to work with him to develop broadly supported legislation that will make meaningful progress to address the undeniable problems that are contributing to declining salmon and steelhead runs.

Solving the riddle of salmon recovery is not an easy endeavor. But despite the policy complexities, the good news is that our political leaders have indeed shown the ability and motivation to make progress. The Pacific Northwest Congressional delegation is uniquely positioned in important leadership positions to build upon the recent successes led by Senator Cantwell. Coming together on the sea lion and culvert legislative reforms shows that progress is possible. But what we need most is for the delegation to recognize the shared goal of restoring our iconic salmon and steelhead runs and start working in earnest toward a comprehensive solution. **SSJ**

**Editor's Note:** *Danielle Cloutier, PhD, is the Pacific Fisheries Policy Director for the American Sportfishing Association and Dan McDonald is a member of ASA's board and serves as treasurer, and is the president of Yakima Bait Company in Granger, Wash.*