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Oregon should join the collaboration to save salmon

By **Guest Columnist****Follow on Twitter**

on September 29, 2012 at 9:00 AM, updated September 29, 2012 at 9:04 AM

By Scott Corwin and Terry Flores

In his Sept. 23 op-ed, Gov. John Kitzhaber calls for other state and tribal leaders to join him in creating a new "table" to reach consensus on how to recover endangered salmon and steelhead species in the Columbia River. We welcome his engagement in this issue, but can't help wonder: Where has he been?

A collaborative table involving all the Northwest states and tribes -- known as the "sovereigns" process -- has been in place since 2005. In addition to the states and tribes, it involves all of the relevant federal agencies, and has the support of two presidential administrations over the past seven years. By 2008, this unprecedented process resulted in a historic agreement and a new science-based plan for salmon and federal hydropower operations. The plan is the largest restoration program for endangered species anywhere in the country.

Oregon has had a seat at that table from the beginning. Unfortunately, it has chosen to continue to litigate the plan instead of joining with the other three Northwest states and more than a dozen tribal leaders who support it.

Gov. Kitzhaber can change that. We recognize that the governor has had a full plate dealing with critical issues his first two years in office, including a dire budget and economic situation. We commend him for his strong desire to engage in the salmon issue, and believe he can bring the leadership Oregon really needs to the successful collaboration that is already under way.

And to his credit, the governor cited much of the progress that is already taking place, including implementation of a massive habitat restoration program and changes to hydropower operations. These changes, along with favorable ocean conditions, have resulted in some of the best salmon runs seen in decades. He's essentially endorsing what is already in place.

He also notes, "It will require everyone to give a little." It is important to point out that not only have federal agencies already stepped up to the plate, but hardworking Northwest families and businesses are already paying for the salmon plan through their electric bills. The habitat restoration program alone costs \$1 billion over 10 years, not including another \$1 billion that has been spent this decade to ensure that dams are more salmon-friendly. Everyone is giving -- not a little, but a lot.

Oregon needs to re-engage in this collaborative process with tribal sovereigns and the other states.

Kitzhaber is the one who can make that happen and move the state away from divisive litigation to a more positive role in the region. All of the other Northwest states' governors have designated knowledgeable representatives to sit at the court-ordered table. They've offered their perspective and expertise. Oregon's seat is waiting to be filled.

We're pleased the governor is calling for an agreement for salmon that "protects fish while maintaining our supply of clean and affordable energy." But, rather than create another duplicative process, we could use the governor's passion and intellect in implementing -- not litigating -- the historic agreement that has already been struck.

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