

## **CCA Pacific Northwest**

# ***It's Time For a Better Vision***

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IN EARLY 2008, THE WASHINGTON AND OREGON FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSIONS decided to convene a diverse group of stakeholders to hash out specific issues associated with lower Columbia River salmon fishery management. This bi-state effort, dubbed "the visioning process," was nearly the same as a group brought together in 2007, but this latest effort supposedly had a more clearly defined purpose.

In response to requests – and concerns – from last year's participants to have clear guidance, the following statement was developed as a guiding light for the process:

*The purpose of this stakeholder group is to develop recommendations regarding a lower Columbia River spring and summer salmon fishery management plan including future allocation of allowable harvests of salmon between the commercial and recreational fisheries.*

The goal of opening the lines of communication between traditionally adversarial groups of sport and commercial fishermen was admirable. However, the process and the spirit of the mission statement turned out to be a vision for maintaining the status quo rather than a commitment to objective discussions and meaningful change. In mid-June, many of the sport fishing groups involved in the bi-state visioning process left the table, stating frustration with a shift away from the effort's original intent.

You see, the goal of creating a long-term vision with the input of all stakeholders quickly veered toward a 10-year fisheries management plan that locks in allocation rates and guarantees the status quo for gill netters for another decade. That is simply unacceptable.

Once again, the emphasis is on how to divide up an increasingly scarce resource rather than a true vision toward conservation and sustainable recovery. We can't even begin to consider salmon recovery on the lower Columbia River until we explore alternatives to gill netting. This wasn't even considered as a reasonable discussion point throughout the process.

Our Pacific salmon fisheries are collapsing all around us, yet we still have people who are in denial that it is time for real change. Unfortunately, many of these people are in positions of leadership in terms of fisheries management, and they don't seem willing or able to consider options for recovery. A 10-year plan that locks in allocation for gill netters wouldn't even see the end of a decade – my guess is that the fishery would completely collapse within the first five years.

It's time to move this battle to another field, one that engages other stakeholders besides commercial and sport fishermen. We can no longer participate in this forced march toward extinction, and I encourage you to get involved and join Coastal Conservation Association. We don't have 10 years to move the dial – we are simply out of time. Please visit [www.ccapnw.org](http://www.ccapnw.org) for more information about CCA.