

State cuts to kill salmon in classroom program

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SEATTLE – Each year, 40,000 school children in the state have been introduced to the life of the salmon through the Salmon in the Classroom program. But beginning in January, the 20-year-old program is ending because of state budget cuts.

The elimination of the program is part of a \$6.2 million cut in the Fish and Wildlife budget.

Teachers who rely on the program to teach schoolchildren to raise salmon and release them into the wild are upset.

"We heard it was on the chopping block," said Steven Garlid, who teaches at Bryant Elementary School in Seattle. "It's been a wonderful program at Bryant for my entire career, 17 years. There's no substitute for watching salmon eggs develop and hatch."

The fifth-grade teacher said his students teach younger ones about salmon, and it is an all-school science program.

"I can only guess what the loss will be," said Garlid. "It's losing a tradition. You can't learn this online. We're losing something that binds the community, and it shows how desperate the state has become."

Craig Bartlett, spokesman for the state Department of Fish and Wildlife, said it was eliminated during the Legislature's special session and also was proposed to be eliminated in Gov. Chris Gregoire's proposed budget for the next two years. The department had paid for the program. It had been available at an average of 495 schools each year.

Eliminating the program will save \$110,000 the rest of this school year and \$442,000 for the next biennium.

All of the money for the program came from the federal government, but the federal funds will be used for other fish and wildlife projects, such as fish-catch assessment and keeping track of salmon in the wild.

"We are sorry to lose the program," said Christy Vassar, program manager with the department's fish program. "Tens of thousands of young people learned about the natural world for the last 20 years, but these are extremely tough economic times, and all state agencies are required to cut back."

The elimination of the program is part of a \$6.2 million cut in the Fish and Wildlife budget, plus an additional \$4 million in lost revenue in the state wildlife fund. "This is just one of a number of cuts," said Bartlett.

James Chandler has been running the program for Fish and Wildlife for the past 12 years and worries that if it is eliminated it will never come back.

"Not only does salmon in the classroom affect students, it bleeds over into adults," he said. "A lot of kids go home with this connection and share it with their parents. My concern is, we're taking another hit in education. I'm deeply hurt; this is a program I fell in love with, and I truly understand the value for students."

Garlid said saving the program would take a grass-roots effort because he doubts the Seattle schools could afford it.

"I've talked to a few parents about this and they're shocked, and the outcry will be heard," he said. "It's such an important program."

Read more: <http://www.theolympian.com/2010/12/26/1485933/state-cuts-to-kill-salmon-in-classroom.html#ixzz19GQOgac>

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