

Diesel crackdown survives opposition: [ALL Edition]

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Abstract

Turns out that salmon farms might be hurting natural ocean fisheries, according to Sea Web, an organization advocating for ocean protection. The group cited findings of Daniel Pauly, a British Columbia scientist, that rather than helping ocean fisheries by reducing demand for wild fish, the fish farms are having an opposite effect.

Pauly found that it takes anywhere from two to five pounds of wild fish processed into feed to produce one pound of farmed salmon. More traditional aquaculture that farmed fish on a diet of plants is being replaced by modern farming of large, carnivorous fish, including salmon, tuna and cod.

"The new trend in aquaculture is to drain the seas to feed the farms. Meanwhile, capture fisheries now focus on what we once considered bait. These two trends, farming up and fishing down the food web, imply massive impacts on marine ecosystems that are clearly unsustainable," Pauly said.

Full Text

President Bush got through the first few days of budget proposals with no firestorm over conservation and environmental funding.

And in one of her first major decisions, the new Environmental Protection Agency administrator announced a crackdown on diesel fumes, which some people in the White House wanted to stop.

So far, so good, for the hopes for less fighting and more work on environmental problems, but environmental advocates are still braced for battle over proposals for a new generation of nuclear power plants and drilling in Alaska for oil.

The president followed through in his budget blueprint with a massive increase in funding for the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund for state, local and national parks and open space.

He is proposing a \$900 million appropriation next year, the largest ever since the fund was established.

In 1994 Congress cut off all funding for the program that, among thousands of projects nationwide, helped build the zoo at Green Hill Park and put a pool in East Park on Shrewsbury Street. The program was revived on an initiative from Worcester's Democratic congressman, James P. McGovern, two years ago, receiving an initial \$30 million appropriation.

Christie Todd Whitman, the former New Jersey governor who now is head of the EPA, ignored criticisms from White House Chief of Staff Andrew Card, a former lobbyist for carmakers, and announced she will follow through with a national crackdown on pollution from diesel trucks and buses.

The program was announced in December by her predecessor, Carol Browner, and was questioned by Mr. Card in a memo to Cabinet members last month. Ms. Whitman, however, announced last week that she will implement the program.

The decision won her early praise from clean-air advocates.

"This program will clean up one of the most noxious sources of air pollution in our communities," said lawyer Vickie Patton of the organization Environmental Defense. "Leading national and international public health agencies have consistently found that diesel exhaust is hazardous."

The program will tighten particulate and nitrogen oxide emissions for large, new diesel trucks and buses starting in model year 2007, and require use of cleaner lower-sulphur diesel fuel nationwide starting in 2006.

Meanwhile, on Beacon Hill, the president's friend, Paul "Celluch" Cellucci, is getting heat over his environment budget.

The Environmental League of Massachusetts complained last week that the governor's budget would cut state environmental spending by 1 percent and fails to keep pace with inflation.

"You can't get clean water from an empty well," said Pamela DiBona, legislative director for the ELM. "We are not giving the state environmental agencies what they need to do the job."

The league would like to see a 6 percent increase in environmental funding. It claimed Massachusetts is now 45th in environmental spending nationwide and 35th in per-capita spending on the environment, "behind Louisiana and Mississippi."

Something is fishy with all that tasty, fresh salmon consumers have been gobbling up from their local markets the last three years.

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On another food front, the group Public Citizen is urging Dr. Bernard Schwetz, acting commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration, to deny all pending applications to begin treating food with radiation.

The group said when the FDA "legalized" use of radiation to sterilize meat, it relied on testing done 30 to 50 years ago, which was not designed to show whether consumption of irradiated food can cause health problems.

Additionally they cited studies from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that show irradiation cannot kill pathogens that cause "mad cow" disease.

While about half of the U.S. food supply can now be treated with radiation, the group said more testing is required before the FDA approves a new request to begin radiating "ready-to-eat" foods.

"The FDA has failed to determine a level of radiation to which food can be exposed and still be safe for human consumption," the group said.

The Environment column appears every other week.

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