

American Rivers • Earthjustice • Endangered Species Coalition
Defenders of Wildlife • League of Conservation Voters
National Wildlife Federation • Sierra Club • Trout Unlimited

January 19, 2022

Dear Senators and Representatives,

Our nation showed what's possible with the recovery of iconic species like the bald eagle, American alligator, peregrine falcon, Louisiana black bear, and humpback whale. We now face the potential extinction of an iconic species central to numerous states and Tribes' ways of life: Columbia River salmon.

On behalf of our millions of members and supporters in the Pacific Northwest and across the country, we write to you today to ask that you summon the same resolve to advance solutions that will effectively recover abundant wild salmon and the more than 130 species, including Southern Resident orcas, that rely upon healthy salmon runs to thrive. We believe the recovery of abundant wild salmon is an urgent issue of great national importance.

For centuries, abundant wild salmon have served as the foundation of Northwest communities, local economics, and Indigenous cultures. Since the completion of the four lower Snake River dams in 1975, the populations of Snake River salmon and steelhead have declined by more than 90 percent — impacting Tribes, fishermen, main street businesses, Northwesterners' identity, and the region's way of life, from the Pacific coast to central Idaho.

If we fail to act, we will all be forced to confront a previously unthinkable question: Who will we be without salmon?

Columbia River and Snake River salmon are running out of time. According to the Nez Perce Tribe Fisheries Department, more than three-quarters of wild spring Chinook populations will be below recoverable levels — below 50 spawners — within four years without action.

We need members of the Northwest delegation, the Biden Administration, and state leaders in Idaho, Oregon, and Washington to forge durable solutions that address the root cause of the precipitous decline and make stakeholders whole. The science is clear: the biggest step we can take to bring back abundant salmon is to restore the lower Snake River and breach the four federal dams that have led to the collapse of Snake River salmon runs. We can do this and build a stronger future for everyone if we act now.

Decades of lowest-common-denominator compromises and half-measures have unsurprisingly failed to recover Columbia River salmon, despite costing taxpayers more than \$17 billion. We need solutions that not only recover abundant salmon, but also support the region's farmers, ranchers, outfitters and guides, outdoor recreationists, and utility customers.

Some present this as a false choice between abundant salmon and economic growth. We can and must have both. The true choice we face is between the status quo — the rapid and inevitable march toward extinction — and bold investments in the Northwest that both recover abundant salmon and leave all states and people, from Idaho to the Pacific Coast, better off.

One year ago, Congressman Mike Simpson (R-Idaho) unveiled a framework — based upon hundreds of meetings and conversations with stakeholders and interests on every side of this issue — that showed how we could address all affected interests in a way that can simultaneously restore the Columbia basin's once-storied salmon runs; meet our treaty responsibilities with Tribes; help Southern Resident orca and other wildlife that rely on healthy, abundant salmon; create jobs and bring sustained prosperity to local economies; and strengthen the region's legacy of clean, affordable, and reliable energy. This framework, which has strong support from more than 50 Northwest Tribes and the 573 Tribes that make up the National Congress of American Indians, provides a foundation for the type of solution we need.

More recently, U.S. Senator Patty Murray (D-Wash.) and Washington Governor Jay Inslee announced a federal-state initiative to consult with Tribes and engage with stakeholders to develop a comprehensive plan for Columbia Basin salmon recovery. An initial focus is to determine whether "there are reasonable means for replacing the benefits provided by the Lower Snake River Dams." And the Biden Administration has committed to pursue a comprehensive solution to the challenges facing people and salmon in the Northwest. Passage of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act in late 2021 has created an exceptional opportunity to fund infrastructure projects needed to transition to a free-flowing lower Snake River and better position the regional economy for prosperity and a clean-energy future.

Both the Biden Administration and the Murray-Inslee initiative have proposed a July deadline to identify a comprehensive solution. We write to you today to request that you not only engage with these efforts, but also that you strive to forge durable solutions as soon as possible. We ask that you join forces with not only our organizations and members, but also Northwest Tribes and the businesses and people who rely on wild salmon.

The Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians put it best in its May 2021 resolution supporting restoration of the lower Snake River: "This is a moment for action, not for more process."

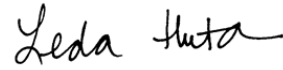
Inaction is the ally of extinction. Northwest salmon are living on borrowed time. From the ongoing obstructions to recovery imposed by the four lower Snake River dams to rising water temperatures and other climate-fueled stressors, every moment of delay makes salmon recovery more difficult. We must act.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



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