

American Rivers ♦ American Whitewater ♦ Association of Northwest Steelheaders ♦ Backbone Campaign
Bellingham Unitarian Fellowship ♦ Boulder-White Clouds Council ♦ Center for Biological Diversity
Center for Environmental Law & Policy ♦ Center for Responsible Forestry ♦ Coastal Trollers Association
Columbia Riverkeeper ♦ Defenders of Wildlife ♦ Earthjustice ♦ Earth Ministry/Washington Interfaith Power and Light
East Shore Unitarian Church, Bellevue (WA) ♦ Endangered Species Coalition ♦ Environment Washington
Faith Action Network & Interfaith Network for Indigenous Communities ♦ Federation of Western Outdoor Clubs
Fly Fishing International ♦ Friends of Grays Harbor ♦ Friends of San Juans ♦ Friends of the Clearwater
Grays Harbor Audubon Society ♦ Great Old Broads for Wilderness ♦ Idaho Outfitters & Guides Association
Idaho Rivers United ♦ Idaho Wildlife Federation ♦ Indivisible ♦ Institute for Fisheries Resources ♦ JUstice Washington
Kitsap Environmental Council ♦ League of Women Voters ♦ Learning Right Relations
Multifaith Network for Climate Justice Bellingham (WA) ♦ National Parks Conservation Association
National Wildlife Federation ♦ Natural Resources Defense Council ♦ Nimiipuu Protecting the Environment
Northwest Guides and Anglers Association ♦ Northwest Sportfishing Industry Association ♦ Northwest Watershed Institute
NW Energy Coalition ♦ Olympia Unitarian Universalist Congregation ♦ Olympic Climate Action ♦ Olympic Forest Coalition
Orca Behavior Institute ♦ Orca Network ♦ Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations
Pacific Rivers ♦ Patagonia ♦ Quimper Unitarian Universalist Fellowship ♦ RE Sources ♦ Rivers Without Borders
Save Our wild Salmon Coalition ♦ Sawtooth Interpretive and Historical Association ♦ Se'Si'Le ♦ Seattle Aquarium ♦ Sierra Club
Skagit Unitarian Universalist Fellowship ♦ Snake River Salmon Solutions ♦ Snake River Savers ♦ Snake River Waterkeeper
Sound Action ♦ Stand.earth ♦ Stillpoint at Beckside Spirituality Center ♦ Surfrider Foundation ♦ The Natural History Museum
Thurston Climate Action Team ♦ Twin Harbors Waterkeeper ♦ Umpqua Watersheds ♦ Vashon Climate Action Group
Vashon Island Unitarian Fellowship ♦ Washington Conservation Voters / Washington Environmental Council ♦ Washington Wild
Washington Wildlife Federation ♦ Whale Scout ♦ Whidbey Environmental Action Network ♦ Wild Orca
Wild Steelhead Coalition ♦ Woodland Park Zoo ♦ WYORCA ♦ 350 Deschutes ♦ 350 Eastside ♦ 350 Eugene
350 Everett ♦ 350 Seattle ♦ 350 Wenatchee ♦ 350 Yakima

November 15, 2022

The Honorable Brenda Mallory, Chair
Council on Environmental Quality
730 Jackson Pl. NW
Washington, D.C. 20503

Chair Mallory,

We write first to convey our heartfelt thanks and gratitude to every member of the Biden Administration involved in producing the NOAA/NMFS report on the science of “Rebuilding Interior Columbia Basin Salmon and Steelhead.” This comprehensive analysis is a definitive science-based affirmation that it will take a comprehensive suite of actions, including restoration of a free-flowing lower Snake River, to recover abundant, harvestable stocks of now-endangered Columbia-Snake Basin salmonids (and equally endangered, salmon-dependent Southern Resident orcas). The federal report’s assessment of the status of endangered Columbia-Snake salmon and steelhead echoes the Nez Perce Tribe’s warning that a alarming proportion of these stocks are beyond, or approaching, a quasi-extinction threshold. These findings impel us to move forward with a sense of urgency to the actual implementation of the report’s “centerpiece actions,” and meet our nation’s tribal treaty obligations.

Senator Patty Murray and Governor Jay Inslee have helped chart that path forward, with their suite of salmon recovery recommendations and the accompanying report on replacing the services the dams now provide. Their recommendations put us on a presumptive path toward a free-flowing lower Snake River. Their report is unequivocal: The status quo is not an option, and the dams’ services can be replaced or their loss mitigated. These recommendations and

conclusions are well-aligned with the direction the Administration charted in the commitments made on August 4 as part of its agreement to extend the pause in litigation in NWF v. NMFS.

We now await, with even greater hope and confidence, fulfillment of the next two specific Administration commitments. These will provide the direction necessary to urgently implement solutions that move us forward:

“By December 1, 2022, the Administration agrees to identify those short-term funding, operational, and other actions that can be implemented in 2023 based on actual and projected funding available from sources across the federal Departments and Agencies,” and

“The Administration commits to collaborating with affected Tribes, States, and regional stakeholders in the FMCS process and, by December 1, 2022, producing a schedule of Administration actions and critical milestones to meet the Administration’s principles and commitments described herein and which the Administration intends to pursue.”

That first order of business – identifying 2023 actions and investments using funds and authorities now available – comes at a critical moment. Both the *Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act* and the *Inflation Reduction Act* contain substantial funds that can jump-start all of the NOAA report’s “centerpiece actions,” especially those having to do with agricultural transportation, irrigation, and power and transmission, to effectively and urgently transition to a free-flowing lower Snake River.

The second December 1 commitment – a schedule of actions and critical milestones – will put flesh on the bones of the Administration’s overarching commitment to develop “a durable long-term strategy to restore salmon and other native fish populations to healthy and abundant levels, honoring Federal commitments to Tribal Nations, delivering affordable and reliable clean power, and meeting the many resilience needs of stakeholders across the region.”

Such a schedule of specific actions and milestones, including commitments to advancing all centerpiece actions, on the Snake, the mid-Columbia and the Upper Columbia, is essential if we’re to not waste the opportunity before us. Not incidentally, it will also send an important message that we are clearly on a path to implementation.

The critical action along that path is to announce on December 1 that the Biden Administration will take the steps necessary to develop a new decision and plan of action to replace the inadequate and illegal Trump dam operations plan. This would include an updated/supplemental Columbia River System Operations Environmental Impact Statement and Biological Opinion. These documents, and a new decision, must be completed in the next two years to allow adequate time for prompt implementation.

A specific concern is the necessity for promptly moving ahead on replacement of, or improvement upon, the energy services the dams now provide. USDOE, and all of its agencies, must have clear and certain actions and schedules for their work on this essential front.

Both as individual Northwesterners and as representatives of fishing and conservation groups, clean energy and orca advocates, faith community and civic organizations, whose members are very much stakeholders in the outcome of these issues, we look forward to working with you,

the Administration and Northwest members of Congress to implement solutions that work for salmon and steelhead (and orcas), for parks and protected areas, for Tribes and utilities, for farmers and anglers and for communities in the Columbia-Snake Basin and on the region's coast.

CC:

Secretary Deb Haaland, U.S. Department of Interior

Secretary Jennifer Granholm, U.S. Department of Energy

Assistant Secretary Michael Connor, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Respectfully,

Bill Arthur, Chair

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