

Environment and Climate Caucus Resolution ECC21-08-19-01
WSDCCRES – XXX– XXXXXX – XXX – ENV – ORCA AND SALMON RECOVERY

SOUTHERN RESIDENT ORCA WHALE AND SALMON RECOVERY

WHEREAS the Southern Resident Killer Whale (Orca) population was listed as endangered in 2005 under the Endangered Species Act and is considered depleted under the Marine Mammal Protection Act¹; and Southern Resident Orcas survive almost exclusively on Chinook Salmon², and due to the decline of Chinook many Southern Resident Orca’s have been observed to be in poor physical condition and experiencing difficulty raising calves³;

WHEREAS salmonids require specific temperature variations and cold water river conditions during migration and spawning cycles for survival⁴, water temperatures in the Columbia and Snake Rivers are regulated by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) under the Clean Water Act 303(d), and Washington and Oregon, have failed to comply by exceeding temperatures for decades resulting in the decline of hundreds of thousands of salmon annually^{5,6,7,8};

WHEREAS studies by the EPA indicate dam removal and the restoration of free flowing water in the Snake River will decrease water temperatures and improve salmonid survival rates⁹, and in 2018 Washington State Governor Jay Inslee and the Southern Resident Killer Whale Task Force were informed by more than 30 salmon biologists that one of the key measures necessary to increase Chinook abundance from the Columbia/Snake system is to permanently restore the Snake River by removing the lower four Snake River dams (LSRD)¹⁰;

WHEREAS numerous cost and benefit analyses indicate sales and annual power production on the LSRDs are not economical, costing taxpayers \$17 billion over the past 30 years on unsuccessful fish recovery efforts^{11,12}. Additionally 9 of the 24 turbines on the LSRDs have exceeded their 45-year service life, while the remaining 15 will reach their service life by 2025. Replacing all 24 turbines will cost an estimated \$1 billion¹³. Idaho Congressional Representative Mike Simpson’s Columbia Basin Initiative includes removal of the LSRDs and outlines a sound plan that will: 1) replace the 3033 megawatts of hydropower capacity from the dams with alternative clean energy, 2) increase agricultural water efficiency, 3) replace Snake River barge traffic from Lewiston to Pasco with energy efficient rail transport, 4) enhance recreational opportunities for all. The Columbia Basin Initiative outlines an estimated \$33.5 billion dollar plan over a ten-year period, of which \$10 billion is earmarked for replacement energy generation, includes funds for returning the Snake River to its natural state.

WHEREAS on July 9th 2021 the Salmon Orca Summit was convened at the Squaxin Island Reservation in Mason County WA, co-hosted by the Nez Perce Tribe and the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians representing more than 50 Indian nations calling for immediate action to save endangered Orcas and the Snake River salmon they depend on, pressing Governor Jay Inslee and elected officials to remove the LSRDs¹⁴. During that Summit Washington State Governor Inslee and Congressional Senator Patty Murray each stated dam removal on the Lower Snake River, a tributary of the Columbia, must remain on the table

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and a comprehensive solution quickly reached to save salmon and Orcas from extinction, and in a statement made by a video call, Inslee said work must get underway urgently to identify ways to replace the services of the dams so next steps can be taken toward a comprehensive solution for salmon recovery¹⁴;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that Washington State Democratic Central Committee (WSDCC) calls on the President of the United States (POTUS) and the 117th Congress to ensure that funding is set aside now in the Biden Administration’s Infrastructure stimulus package for the river restoration that is the only path to the survival of salmon and the orca that depend on them, by breaching the four lower Snake River dams and also to fund replacing the transportation, irrigation and power generation provided by the dams consistent with the goals of Idaho Republican Rep. Mike Simpson’s legislative proposal; and

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the WSDCC acknowledges the work and dedication that Patty Murray and Jay Inslee are bringing to this issue that recognizes the urgency of the situation and transforming the conversation; and

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED the WSDCC calls upon the federal government to withdraw any federal court defense of the prior Administration’s flawed 2020 Columbia River System Environmental Impact Statement, Biological Opinion, and Record Of Decision as a defense of methods and conclusions that is inconsistent with the new Administration’s environmental and Tribal nation principles and priorities.

THEREFORE BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that the WSDCC calls upon Governor Inslee, and both State and Federal Senators and Representatives to take steps to breach the lower four Snake River dams while honoring Tribal nation treaties and subsistence fisheries, providing a Just Transition to living wage jobs, supporting agriculture, recreation, and clean energy without diminishing protections under the Clean Water Act, Endangered Species Act, and National Environmental Policy Act.

References:

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