



Origami Whales Project

July 7, 2020

Submitted regular mail and by electronic mail via:

<https://www.governor.wa.gov/contact/contact/send-gov-inslee-e-message>

Governor Jay Inslee
Office of the Governor
PO Box 40002
Olympia, WA 98504-0002

Dear Governor Inslee:

On behalf of the undersigned organizations representing millions of supporters in the United States and worldwide, I am writing to respectfully request that you publicly endorse the removal of the four lower Snake River dams (Ice Harbor Dam, Lower Monumental Dam, Little Goose Dam, Low Granite Dam) in order to help recover endangered salmon populations and to increase food supplies for critically endangered Southern Resident Killer Whales (SRKW). Dam removal would also benefit the tribes whose cultural and spiritual interests have been significantly and adversely impacted by the construction and operations of the dams.

We appreciate your leadership and efforts to study and facilitate collaborative discussions in regard to the myriad threats to SRKW through the creation of the Southern Resident Orca Task Force (SROTF), your signing of multiple bills to benefit SRKW into law, and, most recently, in the decision by the Washington Department of Ecology to exercise state authority under the Clean Water Act to require federal dam operators to keep the Columbia and Snake rivers cool enough for salmon survival. Individually and collectively these were important actions intended to benefit SRKW and their habitat. Nevertheless, with food as one of the primary limiting factors for the recovery of SRKW, the scientific evidence is clear that the removal of the four lower Snake River dams is the single most important action that can be taken to begin to restore the salmon runs and to rebuild the SRKW population. After decades of expending billions of tax dollars in a failed attempt to mitigate the impacts of the dams on salmon and SRKW, it is time to end such costly and unsuccessful efforts and remove the dams.

As of August 2019, there were only 72 SRKW remaining, with “Mega” (L41) declared to be missing as of January 2020. According to your own SROTF, “the status of the Southern Resident population remains critical, with a declining population, a continued lack of prey and ever-increasing adverse impacts from vessels and toxics.” Without adequate food, SRKW are declining in condition, they are more susceptible to disease and adverse impacts from their contaminant loads, their productivity declines, and calf mortality increases. As reported by Wasser et al. (2017), “low availability of Chinook salmon appears to be an important stressor among these

1 See: <https://medium.com/wagovernor/inslee-signs-bill-package-to-protect-aid-grow-orca-and-salmon-population-in-salish-sea-721b2d4758c9>

2 <https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/aquatics/decisions> (see certifications issued on May 7, 2020)

3 https://www.orcanetwork.org/Main/index.php?categories_file=Births%20and%20Deaths

4 Southern Resident Orca Task Force, Draft Year 2 Report and Recommendations, October 2019 at page 10. Available at: https://www.governor.wa.gov/sites/default/files/SRKWDraftReport_09-24-18.pdf

fish-eating whales as well as a significant cause of late pregnancy failure, including unobserved perinatal loss.” In addition, their ability to access prey when faced with vessel and other anthropogenic ocean noises, which can result in serious physiological and behavioral impacts preventing communication and feeding, is also a critical concern. While the underlying causes of these threats are diverse and complex, SRKW urgently need more food and to live in a quieter environment to recover. Indeed, as determined by Lacy et al. (2017), who conducted a Population Viability Assessment for SRKW, “reducing acoustic disturbance by 50% combined with increasing Chinook by 15% would allow the (SRKW) population to reach 2.3% growth.”

While efforts need to be expanded and expedited to address the contaminants and noise issues in SRKW habitat, the single most important action to address the food shortage for SRKW is to remove the dams to restore the salmon runs. According to data from the Columbia Research Basin, the 2019 spring, summer, and fall Chinook salmon returns for the Lower Granite Dam (the fourth of the four Lower Snake River dams) were 69, 72, and 58 percent below the ten year average, further demonstrating that the mitigation measures intended to increase salmon populations and return numbers while retaining the dams have failed. According to the US Army Corps of Engineers, if the four dams were removed, one model used to assess changes to smolt-to-adult returns to the Lower Granite Dam predicted a 170 percent increase compared to the no-action alternative (i.e., effectively maintaining status quo operations of the dams), providing evidence of the value of removing the dams for SRKW.

The undersigned organizations recognize that the removal of the four Lower Snake River dam will cause impacts to the energy, transportation, and recreation infrastructure in the region with associated economic consequences. According to an economic analysis undertaken by ECONorthwest, “a careful exploration of the range of economic tradeoffs (of dam removal) based on publicly available data suggests the benefits or removal exceed the costs, and thus society would likely be better off without the dams.” Indeed, based on its analysis, ECONorthwest determined that “removing the Lower Snake River Dams will result in a net increase of \$505 million in output, \$492 million in value added, \$408 million in labor income, and 317 annual jobs.”

With so few SRKW remaining on the planet, no one is acting with the urgency necessary to save this unique population. The severity of the situation is even more critical when considering the remaining number of breeding SRKW in the population. At present, there are only 22 female SRKW of breeding age (9 in J-pod, 4 in K-pod, and 9 in L-pod) and only six of these whales have successfully calved in the past five years (2 in J-pod, 0 in K-pod, and 4 in L-pod). Furthermore, only 24 female SRKW (including those not yet of breeding age) have more than 10 reproductive years remaining thereby necessitating urgent action to address the primary threats to SRKW.

Just as Oregon Governor Brown publicly endorsed the removal of the dams in her 17 February 2020 letter to you, your endorsement of the same bold action would send an undeniable message to the Trump administration, federal and state agencies, tribal governments, and your constituents of the need to restore this important salmon habitat to benefit salmon and SRKW.

5 See: <http://www.cbr.washington.edu/>

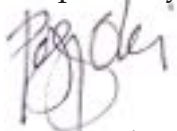
6 US Army Corps of Engineers et al. 2020. Columbia River Systems Draft Environmental Impact Statement. Executive Summary at 25. Available at: <https://cdm16021.contentdm.oclc.org/utills/getfile/collection/p16021coll7/id/13751>

7 ECONorthwest. 2019. Lower Snake River dams economic tradeoffs of removals. Report prepared for Vulcan, Inc. Executive Summary at 8. Available at: https://static1.squarespace.com/static/597fb96acd39c34098e8d423/t/5d41be440a153e0001fee548/1564589713452/LowerSnake_ExecSummary_FINAL_ECONWV4+copy.pdf

Such decisive action will also satisfy the diverse tribal interests, multiple other stakeholders, and the majority of the public who recognize that the removal of these dams will provide significant cultural, recreational, aesthetic, ecological, and economic benefits that far outweigh any adverse consequences.

Thank you in advance for considering this urgent request. Just as you have become a leader in efforts to combat climate change and to responsibly confront the ongoing COVID-19 crisis, we hope that you will demonstrate the same leadership in advocating for SRKW, their habitat, tribal interests, and everyone around the world who cherish these magnificent animals.

Respectfully,



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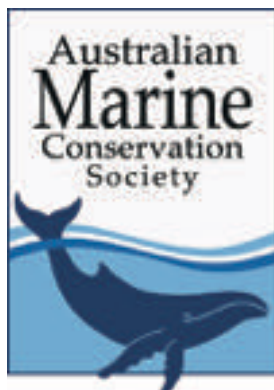
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