

Core Principles to Guide Columbia & Snake River Basin Salmon Recovery

As Congress considers legislative solutions to recover the salmon and steelhead of the Columbia River basin—including breaching the four Lower Snake River dams—it is essential that any such legislation be guided by a set of core principles. We, the undersigned groups, appreciate Rep. Simpson’s having sparked a broader debate on how to restore the basin’s wild salmon and steelhead and the habitat on which they rely, and in particular the seemingly intractable problem of these Snake River dams. However, his proposal contains serious defects that would undermine the very goal he seeks to achieve: restoration of wild salmon and steelhead in Idaho waters. Moreover, by suspending the Clean Water Act, Endangered Species Act, National Environmental Policy Act, and Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) licensing for one to two generations, his proposal would condemn the wild salmon, steelhead, and many other species that populate watersheds throughout the entire Columbia basin.

Because legislative solutions are likely to be both complex and highly technical, and because much is at stake—both the continued existence of species and the wellbeing of people—we believe such solutions should be guided by the following core principles:

- **No Rollbacks.** Legislation to remove the four Lower Snake River dams must not weaken or undermine bedrock environmental laws that provide critical safeguards for all affected communities and species—including aquatic-dependent wildlife—and must ensure accountability to protect against degradation of the environment and human health.
- **Dams and Rivers.** The status of 78 other hydroelectric dams in the Columbia basin must remain subject to the normal regulatory processes under federal and state laws to ensure that wild fish runs are not harmed.
- **Environmental Justice.** Environmental justice must be ensured throughout the Columbia River basin so that no tribes and communities suffer additional water pollution, air pollution, exposure to toxics, or other adverse impacts, and that communities and cultures have access to healthy waters across the basin with self-sustaining runs of wild salmon and other wild fish.
- **Post-Breach Assistance.** Communities affected by breaching the four Lower Snake River dams, whether upstream or downstream, should be provided with robust financial support, worker transition assistance, and access to new economic opportunities to compensate for the loss of services resulting from dam removal.
- **Compensation Priorities.** Financial compensation and assistance should go, first and foremost, to individuals, small businesses, tribes, and local governments that are economically harmed by removal of the four Lower Snake River dams. Mitigation funds should be sparingly provided to corporations and other special interests.
- **Stream Temperatures.** The temperature of basin streams poses an existential threat to cold-water species such as salmon. Widespread restoration of the basin’s streams and rivers with biologically-appropriate riparian buffers—obtained through a combination of financial supports and regulation—must be included in legislation to protect and restore temperature and water quality for fish and other aquatic species, to establish resiliency to climate change, and to

protect cold-water refuges along the mainstem Columbia River. When public funds are invested in habitat restoration, landowners must not be allowed to reverse these gains.

- **Restoration.** Funding should prioritize projects to address cultural and economic harm from the loss of wild fish, including restoration projects for salmonid, lamprey, and sturgeon passage through dams currently blocking historic habitats in order to provide community food and cultural benefits to Indigenous Peoples.
- **Wild Fish.** Wild salmon and steelhead recovery must be given priority over the reliance on hatcheries. Except where wild fish have been extirpated, spending on hatchery programs, including deferred maintenance, must be based on ecological and economic costs and benefits.
- **Salmon Protections.** Salmon habitat restoration must follow the best available science, incorporate existing “limiting factors analyses”; be sufficient to meet the state water quality standards established to protect salmon, steelhead, and bull trout; and provide for the stream flows needed to ensure their continued viability.
- **Role of Science.** Scientific capacities, including independent review, should be strengthened by the addition of tribal and state scientists to existing scientific review and management processes rather than defunding or eliminating existing capacities in the basin.
- **Tribal Governance.** Governance systems for the waters and fisheries of the basin should include tribal and community voices while also righting historic wrongs visited upon the basin’s tribes.
- **Factory Farms.** Subsidizing the continued operation or expansion of factory farms cannot be included in any legislative proposal given their high level of adverse impacts to air and water quality, water resources, climate change, and human health.
- **Energy.** The Bonneville Power Administration must be retained as a public entity. Power generation must prioritize energy efficiency and renewable sources, not include nuclear power, and focus on decentralized energy production to minimize any new burdens placed on an aging power grid.
- **Transportation.** Transportation infrastructure spending should prioritize upgrades and expansion of rail service to minimize vehicle impacts to the Columbia River Gorge. Funding should not be directed towards dredging of the mainstem and mouth of the Columbia River.

Blue Mountains Biodiversity Partnership, Cascadia Wildlands, Center for Biological Diversity, Center for Food Safety, Christian Council of Delmarva, Deschutes River Alliance, Endangered Species Coalition, Environmental Protection Information Center, Friends of the Earth, Food & Water Watch, International Marine Mammal Project of Earth Island Institute, Klamath Forest Alliance, Native Fish Society, Northwest Center for Alternatives to Pesticides, Northwest Environmental Advocates, Nuclear Information and Resource Service, NY4WHALES, Orca Conservancy, Oregon Wild, The Conservation Angler, Waste Action Project, WaterWatch of Oregon, Western Nebraska Resources Council, Wild Fish Conservancy, Willamette Riverkeeper, WildEarth Guardians, World Salmon Forum