

May 27, 2015

Dear President Obama:

The Southern Resident Killer Whales need your help. On May 14, NOAA identified them as one of the 8 ESA-listed species most likely to go extinct in the near future unless immediate action is taken. These are America's orcas, known and loved by people across the nation. They're dying because they're not getting enough fish, and we believe you can save them.

The Columbia-Snake River Basin is the largest historic source of food for these whales, which were listed as endangered in 2005. These socially, culturally, and genetically distinct orcas are the center of a booming whale-watch industry and an icon of the Pacific Northwest. Since their endangered listing, their population has continued to decline, and scientists agree the biggest obstacle to their recovery is lack of their primary prey: Chinook salmon. Breaching the four lower Snake River dams is the single most beneficial action being considered that would help these whales recover.

The Columbia River was once one of the top salmon producing rivers in the world, generating millions of fish and supporting the hundreds of species that thrive off salmon, from humans to killer whales. Over 220 major dams are now in place along the Columbia River system, and are the major impediment to salmon recovery. Some of these dams play crucial roles in our modern day world, but others are no longer serving their intended purpose. Biological, economic, and technical experts agree that the four Lower Snake River dams, completed in 1975, would have untold positive benefits if removed. There is widespread agreement that these dams should come down among fisheries and whale scientists, environmental groups, commercial and recreational fishermen, tribes, local businesses, and prominent individuals across the nation.

The fight to breach these dams has simply gotten bogged down in politics, as a small number of dam proponents such as the Bonneville Power Association have skewed the facts in the media, convinced tribes to sign binding agreements not to discuss dam removal, and benefitted from the history of being in a pro-dam state. The truth is these dams are no longer providing enough benefits to justify their expense. Originally built primarily for navigation, freight traffic has declined enough for the river to meet the Army Corps' definition of "negligible use". Also used for hydropower, the dams are producing power at less than a third of their capacity, and affordable energy alternatives are readily available or already in place. These dams have high upcoming maintenance costs, and with many Army Corps projects underfunded, breaching these dams would allow more money to go where it's needed.

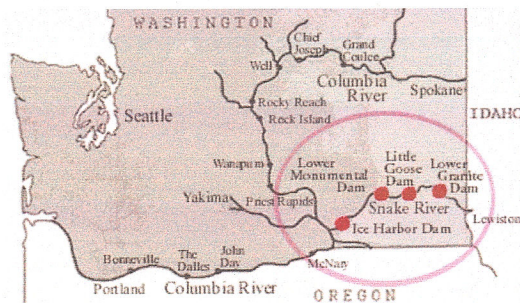
It's clear these dams will eventually come down, but the Southern Resident Killer Whales don't have time to wait for the right political climate. We are asking you to take an administrative action, such as an executive order, to breach the dams and save these whales. In the process you will also help salmon survive climate change, uphold native treaty rights, and save taxpayers millions of dollars. It's a win-win-win scenario. We believe dam breaching can be funded without appropriations from Congress and that the first dam could come down before the end of your Presidential term.

Attached here are summary documents further explaining why now is the time to breach these dams and why it makes sense both biologically and economically. We, along with other experts, are available to meet with you and your staff to further brief you on this issue whenever is convenient.

Sincerely,

Dr. Gary Weiss, MD
Jim Waddell, PE

Monika Wieland, Marine Biologist
Cindy Hansen, Marine Educator



"We have built one dam [in the USA] for every day since Jefferson signed the Declaration of Independence...Surely among 75,000 there are a few mistakes."
-Former Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt