

Howard Garrett's Response to Senator Ranker's Interview

This is a very interesting interview. Sen. Ranker has some very good ideas, like a new rescue tug stationed in the San Juan Islands, and a complete ban on all offshore oil or gas drilling, for all the reasons he mentions. This is good public education about some very serious issues and I commend Sen. Ranker for explaining them so clearly.

The idea of increasing hatchery production of salmon 50-80% is very popular with many constituencies but seems a bit rushed. Hatcheries tend to harm native salmon populations in several ways, so while hatcheries need to continue to mass produce salmon for human and orca consumption, it needs to be done very carefully, in harmony with the needs of native salmon as we restore habitats and allow native populations to thrive again.

His comments on the Snake River dams were a good step in the right direction but poorly informed, although he's received the accurate information. It's easy to toss smears like "malpractice" around, to misrepresent the words of others then call that malpractice is itself a low blow. Ranker says we should "have discussions" and "look at the data," and he equates the Snake River dams with other dams like the Skagit River dam, but the data are crystal clear that the potential for spawning success in the Snake River watershed is exponentially greater than in the Skagit or in any other, or in fact all other watersheds combined, so they value from breaching is in no way similar.

Sen. Ranker also says if we breach the dams tomorrow we won't have millions of fish in the Salish Sea tomorrow, which is of course true and nobody says anything like that. What the data show is that given the fact that approximately 20 million Chinook salmon juveniles (1.5 years of age) are either released from hatcheries upstream of the dams, or spawn naturally from the remnant populations of native fish that made it past the dams, and that approx. 10% of those are lost in the slackwater reservoirs or from passing over each of the four dams, so about 7-8 million juveniles die from passing those dams. Many more are lost in the four mainstem Columbia dams, but not as many per dam as in the Snake River, and those dams will remain in place due to their economic value. So about 10 million juvenile Chinook salmon make it to the ocean. Of those 7-8 million juvenile Chinook who would have made it to the ocean if they hadn't been stopped by the Snake River dams, approximately 2 million would be likely to return to the coastal shelf and the Columbia River within 2 years and would be in the range of the starving So. Resident orcas. That's a significant increase in available food for Southern Residents, and far more than would possibly result from any other single recommendation proposed by the Senator or the Task Force.

So it's inaccurate to characterize the respected scientist Sen. Ranker refers to who he says have been saying that "if we just take down the dams everything's fixed and we shouldn't even be talking about vessels, or about toxics, or anything else. That is malpractice," says Sen. Ranker, and that "if you're a scientist and you're saying that's the one silver bullet and we shouldn't do anything else, it's shameful." True, but no respectable scientist is saying any such thing, so Sen. Ranker is creating a caricature and then bashing it in his effort to silence responsible criticism.

The criticism is based on the data-driven facts that while addressing other issues like vessels, toxins, hatcheries, or increased spill over the dams may help increase salmon consumption marginally, allowing salmon access to, and from, the Snake River watershed would by all calculations increase salmon availability by at least 2 million adult Chinook, and that would likely further increase as wild runs rebuild and the native fish grow stronger and larger. That's what the respected scientists are saying, and it's not malpractice, it's solid science and it addresses precisely the mandate given by Gov. Inslee to his Orca Recovery Task Force. Sen. Ranker needs to reconsider his harsh and inaccurate character attack and look at the data already available, and reflect that data in his remarks.

On the issue of vessel traffic, pinning the blame on whale watching is popular with some constituencies but it is not as detrimental as shipping traffic according to two new studies, so should be addressed equally if the data are important. **And if all vessels were silenced tomorrow, the Southern Residents would still be starving** because the Chinook have dwindled to the point of near extinction also, and must be dramatically increased as soon as possible, or all the other efforts will be moot.

Yes, we need to have bold conversations about whether those dams should be there, and we need to look at the data and have those discussions, and be willing to consider removing those dams. Not doing so is also negligent.

But the studies have been done, the EIS has been written, the authority to breach on the part of the Army Corps is clear, and the data are readily available. Sen. Ranker needs to learn these facts and begin his discussion on the basis of what is already known, rather than meekly call for bold discussions and considerations and then smear those who present the factual data.

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ABOVE PHOTO SIMULATION OF A LOWER GRANITE CHANNEL BY-PASS WRITTEN IN THE 2002 EIS