

December 11, 2018

Dear [OSA partners],

Howard offers a very fine summary of what needs to be done to try to save the southern resident orca from extinction. This iconic population had the misfortune of coming to this region millennia before human arrival and depending on one of its most prolific natural resources for survival (Chinook salmon)... then along came the humans with their unquenchable appetite and waste of these same resources. It was not enough that we converted most of the salmon to cans and dollars, we also destroyed and despoiled the habitats they require to survive. We have been driving them toward extinction ever since we arrived.

There is nothing new about humans driving other species to extinction. We do it all of the time. What is a bit of new twist on the current scene is an outpouring of sentiment to save the whales with near total disregard for the understanding I have gained from over forty years of living with the whales and studying them in intimate detail. I did not come to the conclusion from thin air that we MUST breach the Snake River dams immediately to save these whales or the SR salmon. That was the result of a very careful reading of the facts about how many fish the whales need and where they could conceivably come from. Nor did I make up the fact that the southern resident orca population is not faring or reproducing well. They have probably passed the crossroad toward inevitable extinction, along with the natural Chinook salmon that the American Fisheries Society warned about more than a decade ago.

The vexing part of this situation is the formation of a coalition of folks using the good names Orca and Salmon to sign on to business and government proceeding as usual in a slow process that is guaranteed to end in the extinction of my beloved southern resident orca population. A few salmon may survive, but not enough to support the whales. You have diluted my voice in this process by pretending to speak for the orca, while sealing their fate. Please change your stance to support immediate breaching of the Snake River dams, and let Governor Inslee know this week of your determination.

Ken Balcomb