

DEAR SENATOR MURRAY AND SENATOR CANTWELL,

As community leaders and business owners from the westside of Washington state, we are inspired by the April 28 letter from many of our eastside neighbors asking for your leadership to help Washington and the Northwest resolve the long-standing salmon crisis in the Columbia Basin. We join their request for your assistance to bring together Washington stakeholders - farmers, fishermen, energy users, businesses and communities - to develop solutions that are legal, effective, durable and beneficial to all.

We agree that this different, ground-up approach is needed. We doubt the Obama Administration's status quo plan, delivered last month to U.S. District Court Judge James Redden, will be found lawful. Regardless of what ultimately transpires in the courtroom, however, this plan will not restore the Columbia Basin's endangered salmon and steelhead, nor end the longstanding uncertainties faced by businesses and communities statewide. And we agree that it misses opportunities for our state that may emerge if Washington stakeholders can work directly together toward common solutions.

The consequences of the steep salmon and steelhead declines in the Columbia and Snake Basin -- cultural loss, broad economic harm, diminished quality of life, persistent uncertainty -- are not limited to eastern Washington or the Basin. Commercial and recreational fishing, a powerful economic engine for the lower Columbia and Washington coast for generations, has been deeply harmed. Our state's salmon economies have lost thousands of family-wage jobs, with hundreds of westside businesses and their communities suspended in uncertainty over whether they have a future or not. Restoring a river to re-establish productive, sustainable Columbia Basin fisheries would be a great boon to westside communities.

In addition, the science is now plain that recovery of Puget Sound's endangered Southern Resident Killer Whales and recovery of endangered chinook salmon in the Columbia Basin are inextricably linked. The 2008 Recovery Plan for these orcas recognizes that steep declines in Columbia and Snake River chinook have resulted in a critical loss of preferred prey during the six months the orcas spend outside of Puget Sound. The Columbia Basin, and particularly the Snake Basin, provides our greatest opportunity to restore significant chinook populations to foster orca survival and recovery. We know you understand both the cultural and economic importance of Puget Sound's orcas to people, businesses and communities throughout the Sound. The prolonged endangerment of Columbia/Snake salmon leaves at risk orcas and all they mean to Washington.

We know some will try to use Columbia Basin salmon recovery as a wedge to divide our state. To the contrary, we see its challenge as an opportunity to bring people together and leverage common solutions for our economies and towns on both sides of the Cascades. The farmlands, fisheries, waters, and energy and transportation infrastructures of the Columbia Basin are invaluable, interconnected assets for our entire state. Common solutions that benefit all are, we believe, possible. The likeliest source of such solutions - given the continuing federal failure to develop and implement them - is the affected stakeholders themselves.

We therefore join our friends on the eastside to ask for your leadership to bring all affected interests together - farmers, fishermen, energy users, business owners, and local community leaders - to develop a sound salmon plan that also leverages farm, energy and transportation benefits for the people of Washington state.

Thank you for considering our request. We are ready to work with you and all others to craft a lawful, science-based, job-creating strategy that restores salmon, benefits farms, bolsters fisheries, assures clean affordable energy, improves transportation, and restores orcas.

Sincerely,

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To view this letter and the full list of more than one hundred signers, and the April 28th letter from eastern Washington business and community leaders, visit: www.workingsnakeriver.org/letter