



SPOKANE
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It's Your River ♦ We Protect It

Spokane Riverkeeper
35 W Main STE 308
Spokane WA 99201

July 3rd, 2023

To the Council on Environmental Quality,

The Spokane Riverkeeper is an advocacy organization whose mission is to protect and restore the Spokane River Watershed to ecological health and protect water quality for public use. As such our organization cares deeply about the recovery of salmon runs in the Columbia Basin.

Please remember that the Columbia Basin is in crisis. Less than 2% of the 16 million salmon that once migrated in the Columbia River Watershed are now surviving. Nearly 300,000 Chinook salmon migrated into the Spokane River. No native salmon are left in the Spokane and such low numbers elsewhere in the Basin have had devastating effects on the ecosystems and the cultures and traditions of the Northwest in the salmon country. Specifically, in the upper Columbia Basin and the Spokane River Basin where Grand Coulee Dam completely extirpated runs of salmon, indigenous cultures have lost the vital runs of salmon that are key to ways of life including physical, emotional, and psychological health. All communities existing in the Columbia Basin are left without the economic, psychic, and spiritual benefits of salmon and anadromous fish. Additionally, ecosystems exist in a kind of biological poverty without the salmon and the ocean nutrients that they deliver from the ocean to the rivers. The Spokane River has only 300 redband trout per mile as they live in a river where salmon no longer give their bodies and nutrients up to the riverbed after spawning. This natural cycle is now broken.

Given this, we are asking for a comprehensive package of reforms and policies that do two things: recover salmon in the Upper Columbia Basin and the Lower Columbia Basin at the same time in a cohesive, harmonious effort. This means the efforts across the basin should be harmonized and undertaken with equity as a team effort that respects all parties in all reaches of the watershed.

First, deliver natural and lasting resources to create vibrant salmon runs in the Upper Columbia Basin above Chief Joseph Dam and Grand Coulee Dam. This means providing the monetary resources, technical expertise, and congruent policies to create a

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salmon passage for up and downstream migration routes, habitat protection, and river flow protection to assure that the Upper Columbia Tribal phased plans and actions of recovering runs are brought into reality. Currently, the Upper Columbia United Tribes have a phased plan that is bringing salmon back to an area above the Grand Coulee Dam that represents 40% of the historic habitat. This includes the Spokane River Watershed and those areas in Canada where salmon once fulfilled their life cycle and supported First Nations in the North.

Second, in the lower Basin, we ask the administration to ignore the politics of this crisis and follow the scientific realities of salmon recovery. Please conduct an additional supplemental Environmental Impact Statement on the Columbia Basin hydro-system. The science of salmon recovery in the Snake River Basin is clear, the four lower Snake River Dams need to be breached and restored to appropriate natural flowing conditions in order to recover salmon. This issue has been clear for decades - the four lower Snake River dams are costing the Basin far more than they deliver. In fact, since the beginning, these dams destroy runs of fish, and cultural and recreational values, and benefit only a few powerful industrial interests over the massive and broad needs of communities from Stanley Idaho to Vancouver Island. The four lower Snake River dams are:

- Old and costly to maintain. In fact, were it not for the support of taxpayer dollars, these “White Elephant” dams would have been mothballed decades ago. They cost taxpayers millions and benefit only a few powerful interests. In this sense, they are “Pork Barrel” projects.
- They are preventing the Salish Sea from thriving. Top ecosystem community members like the Orca are dwindling as a result of these dams, compromising the health of ocean and sea life systems.
- They prevent lower Basin Tribes from fully thriving on healthy runs of salmon, and practicing traditional ways that go back thousands of years.
- They are effectively ensuring native salmon extinction.

In conclusion, the Spokane Riverkeeper asks that politics be put aside, and restore a common sense, values-based, scientific approach to addressing the crisis in our basin.

Respectfully,



Jerry White, Jr
Spokane Riverkeeper
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