



PRESS STATEMENT

November 10, 2020
Vancouver, WA

In Joint Letter to Governors, Dozens of Northwest Leaders Urge Holistic Approach to Four-State Salmon Recovery Process

Dear Governors Brown, Bullock, Inslee, Little and Governor-Elect Gianforte:

On behalf of over three million of the region's community-owned utility customers and thousands of small businesses, farms, and manufacturers which depend on clean, affordable hydropower, recreation, irrigation, and navigation, we thank you for coming together to actively work on salmon recovery in the Pacific Northwest.

We collectively embrace the critical importance of healthy salmon populations for the Pacific Northwest and its Tribal Nations. The communities and organizations we represent live here and care greatly for the region's natural environment. It is part of our shared Northwest ethic and heritage.

As Northwest states move towards bold clean energy goals, we point out that several of the nation's most respected environmental advocacy groups [recently acknowledged](#) hydropower's importance in the nation's fight against climate change.

Regionally, hydropower plays an even bigger role, providing close to half of all our electricity and 90% of our renewable electricity.

As a result, our region has the least carbon-intensive electric service and the most-affordable renewable power in the nation. It is crucial that we retain this leadership position in clean and affordable energy to meet the region's equity, environmental health, and economic recovery objectives.

Our respective organizations have never believed there is any inherent conflict between the region's hydropower, irrigation, recreation, and navigation systems and healthy salmon populations. The data reflect this perspective.

Viewed on a decade-by-decade basis, the numbers of adult salmon returning to the Columbia River Basin have seen significant improvements since the lower

Columbia River dams and lower Snake River dams were built, bolstered by successful hatchery programs and significant fish passage improvements.

There is no denying, however, that compared to the number of juvenile smolts produced, the overall percentage of returning adults is on the decline. That trend is not unique to the Columbia River Basin.

A new peer-reviewed [study](#) published in *Fish & Fisheries* shows there have been near-uniform declines in Chinook salmon survival across the West Coast of North America over the past 50 years.

This finding includes rivers with dams and those without dams; from pristine rivers in Alaska to more urbanized rivers in the Puget Sound. The study shows these declines have averaged approximately 65% over the 50-year period. Research indicates this general trend applies to steelhead and southern coho populations, as well.

Two other studies released this summer also point to the strong relationship between climate change, warming oceans, and declining salmonid health.

In its recently released [Biological Opinion](#) (p 276), NOAA Fisheries showed that climate change appears to have a much larger effect on Chinook salmon survival in the oceans than in rivers. Alarming, NOAA indicates Chinook salmon populations may face extinction in 20 to 30 years if the observed relationships between warming ocean temperatures and salmon survival continue.

Pointing to a more hostile ocean environment, due to ocean-warming and competition from pink salmon, scientists at the University of Alaska [found](#) the size of Chinook and sockeye salmon in Alaska's rivers has declined significantly since 1960, as salmon are spending fewer years at sea. The researchers purposely chose a region of North America without dams to isolate this oceanic effect.

It is often implied that breaching the lower Snake River dams will solve the problem of salmon recovery because we are told its habitat is pristine. However, decades of development have taken a toll on many areas of the river. Additionally, the *Fish and Fisheries* study demonstrates that even truly pristine rivers have experienced equivalent steep declines in adult salmon survival.

In conclusion, the referenced studies show salmon struggles are not isolated to the Columbia River Basin. Instead, we have an ocean-wide problem, which requires a holistic approach and perspective.

Accordingly, we, the signatories of this letter, call for the following guiding principles to effectively guide the four-state process:

- **Trans-Oceanic Acknowledgement:** Solutions must be grounded in the fact there is strong scientific research demonstrating the declines in key salmon populations are due to warming, acidifying oceans that are shifting the balance between salmon predators and prey. If these trends continue, salmon survival may decline even further. If this reality is not understood as the baseline, then the solutions that come out of the four-state process will inevitably be unsuccessful.
- **Holistic Approach:** Solutions must be holistic in nature, addressing the broad nature of salmon survival declines. As a result, favored solutions should prioritize efforts to address challenges in the shared ocean environment.
- **Social Cost of Carbon:** Solutions must be evaluated for their effect on the social cost of carbon. The recently adopted Record of Decision for Columbia River System Operations includes data-driven estimates for carbon production increases if hydropower generation is diminished.
- **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion:** Solutions must be examined for their likely socioeconomic and health impacts for under-represented and vulnerable communities that need access to affordable energy, clean air, and agricultural jobs. The recently adopted Record of Decision for Columbia River System Operations includes relevant scenarios for increased customer costs if hydropower generation is diminished.
- **Wildfires & Climate-Driven Disasters:** Solutions must not add to the risk of wildfires and other climate-driven disasters that can affect both salmon and people.
- **Balanced:** Solutions must be balanced in nature when evaluating the hydropower system, recognizing the Congressionally-authorized multiple purposes of the Federal Columbia River Power System. These purposes include flood control, navigation, recreation, irrigation, and electricity production.
- **Scientific Rigor:** Solutions that would diminish significant clean energy resources and/or low carbon transportation infrastructure must undergo non-partisan and rigorous scientific testing before adoption.

Once again, we thank you for your efforts as you plan to bring diverse stakeholder groups together to help the region recover threatened and endangered salmon populations. This goal is incredibly important. We offer our pledge to assist you in the process as regional stakeholders and to provide subject matter expertise.

Respectfully,

Kurt Miller
Northwest RiverPartners



REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

John Francisco
Northwest Requirements Utilities



Kristin Meira
Pacific Northwest Waterways Assn



STATEWIDE ORGANIZATIONS

Will Hart
Idaho Consumer-Owned Utilities Association



Stacey Satterlee
Idaho Grain Producers Association



Joseph Anderson-Genesee
Idaho Wheat Commission



Gary Wiens
Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association



Roger Kline
Oregon People's Utility District Assn



Ted Case
Oregon Rural Electric Cooperative Assn



Clint Carlson
Oregon Wheat Growers League



Ryan Poe
Washington Assn of Wheat Growers



Gary Bailey
Washington Grain Commission



Kent Lopez
Washington Rural Electric Cooperative Assn



Joe Lukas
Western Montana G&T

**WESTERN MONTANA ELECTRIC
GENERATING & TRANSMISSION COOPERATIVE, INC.**

MEMBER/PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

Michael J. Bradshaw

Mike Bradshaw
Benton Rural Electric Association



Randy Grove

Randy Grove
Central Lincoln People's Utility District



Scott Peters

Scott Peters
Columbia Rural Electric Association



Roman E. Gillen

Roman Gillen
Consumers Power Inc.



Kevin Nordt

Kevin Nordt
Grant PUD



Kristin Masteller

Kristin Masteller
Mason PUD 1



Alex McGregor

Alex McGregor
The McGregor Company
McGregor Land & Livestock



Roger Kline

Roger Kline
Northern Wasco People's Utility District



David Doernsfield

David Doernsfield
Port of Lewiston
Idaho - USA



Chad Black

Chad Black
Raft River Electric Cooperative



Tony Schacher

Tony Schacher
Salem Electric Cooperative



###

About Northwest RiverPartners

Northwest RiverPartners (NWRP) is a not-for-profit, member-driven organization. We represent not-for-profit, community-owned utilities across Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, and Nevada. We also proudly represent farmers, ports, and businesses across the region that support clean energy and low-carbon transportation.

NWRP is focused on raising awareness about how the Northwest's hydropower system betters communities and the natural environment, and we encourage

science-based solutions that help hydropower and salmon coexist and thrive. <http://nriverpartners.org>