

**RESOLUTION OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION TEAM, ORCAS ISLAND WOMEN'S COALITION,
SAN JUAN COUNTY, WASHINGTON,
ON THE RECOVERY OF ENDANGERED SALMON AND KILLER WHALES**

WHEREAS, the waters of San Juan County, Washington, within the Salish Sea are the heart of the endangered Southern Resident Killer Whales' "Summer Core Area Critical Habitat."¹

WHEREAS, San Juan County's identity is intertwined with killer whales to such an extent that one features prominently on the county's logo, representing our famed natural wonders.

WHEREAS, killer whales are cultural and spiritual icons to Tribal Nations, including the *Lhaq'temish* (Lummi) Nation, whose teachings hold that they have kinship bonds to the Southern Resident Killer Whale J, K, and L pods, whom they call by the Lummi family name *Sk'aliCh'elh*.²

WHEREAS, a healthy population of Southern Resident Killer Whales is important to the San Juan County economy as a source of natural wonder and as participants in an intact marine ecosystem.³

WHEREAS, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) identifies Southern Resident Killer Whales as one of nine marine species at risk of imminent extinction unless immediate action is taken.⁴

WHEREAS, Southern Resident Killer Whales, designated as an endangered species in 2005, have fallen from a peak population of 98 individuals in 1995 to only 73 today, due to cumulative pressures tied to nutritional stress caused by the decline in their primary food source - wild Chinook salmon.^{5 6}

Whereas, the decline in Chinook salmon exacerbates the other major threats to Southern Resident Killer Whales including accumulated manmade toxins that, when the killer whales are unable to find enough food, are released into their bloodstream and fed to nursing calves.⁷

WHEREAS, according to NOAA's recovery plan for Southern Resident Killer Whales, the single greatest change in food availability for resident killer whales since the late 1800s has been the decline of salmon from the Columbia River basin.⁸

WHEREAS, almost 50% of the wild Chinook and steelhead in the Columbia River basin historically came from the Snake River but today only 1-2% of wild fish numbers return to the Snake River Basin and all of its salmon and steelhead populations face extinction.^{9 10}

WHEREAS, neither the Southern Resident Killer Whales nor the Snake River Chinook populations are meeting Endangered Species Act recovery targets despite the nearly

\$20 billion which Bonneville Power Administration reports has been spent since 1981 on fish and wildlife remediation. The efficacy of these tremendously expensive efforts continually fail to pass muster in federal court. ¹¹

WHEREAS, wild Chinook salmon face survival pressure from harvest, hydroelectric installations, hatcheries, habitat loss and predation from marine mammals. Yet, in its 2000 Biological Opinion regarding the operation of hydroelectric dams on the Columbia and Snake Rivers, NOAA Fisheries concluded: “breaching the four lower Snake River dams would provide more certainty of long-term survival and recovery [of salmon] than would other measures.”¹²

WHEREAS, in 2019, 55 fisheries scientists and natural resource scientists warned policymakers that increasingly lethal water temperatures in the lower Snake River caused by “hydro-electric development that created slackwater reservoirs and a changing climate” are contributing to the decline in salmon and steelhead, and “the restoration of the lower Snake River by breaching its four dams is the only action available that can substantially cool mainstem water temperatures on a long-term basis.”¹³

WHEREAS, removing the dams would “open the gateway to a vast, 5,500-mile expanse of largely intact spawning and rearing streams that run through millions of acres of wilderness. These are the highest elevation streams, and, therefore, the most global warming resistant salmon streams in the entire lower 48 states” ¹⁴

WHEREAS, in 2020, a scientific white paper concluded that restoring the Snake River including the removal or breaching of the four Lower Snake River Dams is the single largest, most effective step to restore both the Chinook and the Southern Resident Killer Whales.¹⁵

WHEREAS, in 2021, 68 of the nation’s and region’s best qualified salmon and fisheries experts sent a letter to policymakers summarizing their scientific consensus on key aspects of salmon recovery in the Snake/Columbia River Basin, concluding unequivocally that “These four [Lower Snake River] dams must be removed to not only avoid extinction, but also to restore abundant salmon runs.”¹⁶

WHEREAS the timetable for restoring the Snake River including removing or breaching the four Lower Snake River Dams should match the urgency of the extinction crises being experienced by the fish in the Columbia River Basin and the Southern Resident Killer Whales who rely on them as a primary food source.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Orcas Women’s Coalition, Orcas Island, San Juan County, State of Washington, urgently calls on President Biden, the Washington Congressional Delegation and the 117th Congress to authorize this year, no later than December 31, 2022, the funds and plans necessary for breaching the Lower Snake River dams.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, we support the work of Senator Murray and Governor Inslee to develop a comprehensive plan that unequivocally calls for breaching the dams and provides the

funding necessary to do so and that Senator Cantwell, Representative Rick Larsen and other Pacific Northwest leaders join them in working together toward this end.

DATE: May 5, 2022

SIGNED:

Susan Bauer, Chair

OWC Environmental Action Team

¹ **Existing and Revised Critical Habitat for Southern Resident Killer Whales**, NOAA (2020), <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/action/critical-habitat-southern-resident-killer-whale>,

² **One Stolen Whale, the web of life, and our collective healing** <https://grist.org/fix/lummi-nation-southern-resident-killer-whale-salish-sea-return/>,

³ **The Whales In Our Waters – The Economic Contribution of Whale Watching in San Juan County**, Earth Economics (2019) <https://www.eartheconomics.org/srkw>,

⁴ **Endangered Species Conservation: Species in The Spotlight** www.fisheries.noaa.gov/topic/endangered-species-conservation#species-in-the-spotlight,

⁵ **Endangered predators and endangered prey: Seasonal diet of Southern Resident killer whales**

Hanson MB, Emmons CK, Ford MJ, Everett M, Parsons K, et al. (2021)

<https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0247031> <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0247031>

⁶ **2015 scientists' letter to Senator Murray**: <https://www.wildsalmon.org/images/factsheets-and-reports/2015-Murray-SRKW-Scientist's-Ltr.pdf>,

⁷ **Modulation in Persistent Organic Pollutant Concentration and Profile by Prey Availability and Reproductive Status in Southern Resident Killer Whale Scat Samples**, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/27186642/> Jessica Lundin, et al

⁸ **Recovery Plan for Southern Resident Killer Whales**, NOAA (2008)

<https://repository.library.noaa.gov/view/noaa/15975>,

⁹ **Wild Salmon and the Shifting Baseline Syndrome: Application of Archival and Contemporary Redd Counts to Estimate Historical Chinook Salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*) Production Potential in the Central Idaho Wilderness** https://www.fs.fed.us/rm/pubs_journals/2020/rmrs_2020_thurow_r003.pdf

¹⁰ **Chinook Salmon (Protected)** <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/species/chinook-salmon-protected>,

¹¹ (various reports) <https://www.wildsalmon.org/news-and-media/news/cbb-report-on-2018-bpa-fish-wildlife-costs-released-for-comment-16-8-billion-since-1981.html>, <https://www.nwcouncil.org/sites/default/files/2021-2.pdf>, https://www.nwcouncil.org/media/filer_public/28/ff/28ff9f32-46cd-40d2-807a-3a6287e12603/2022-1.pdf,

¹² **Federal Caucus' 2000 FCRPS BiOp**

<https://www.salmonrecovery.gov/BiologicalOpinions/FCRPSBiOp/2000FCRPSBiOp.aspx>, 2000 BiOp

¹³ **Letter from scientists dated October 23, 2019** <https://www.idahorivers.org/news/2019/10/23/scientists-alert-policy-makers-in-letter-that-urgent-action-needed-to-cool-river-waters-to-prevent-salmon-extinction>,

¹⁴ **Southern & Columbia/Snake River Chinook: A Review of the Available Scientific Evidence**, Deborah A. Giles, Ph.D. et al https://www.wildsalmon.org/images/factsheets-and-reports/2020.Salmon.Orca_Scientist.White_Paper.Feb.20.pdf,

¹⁵ **Ibid**

¹⁶ **Letter from scientists dated February 22, 2021**

<https://www.wildsalmon.org/Imagess/2021.Sci.Letter.Final.2.22.21.pdf>,