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The Washington State Democrat Environment and Climate Caucus (ECC) adopts resolution Establish Rights of the Snake River

Seattle, WA – The rights of the Snake River have been adopted via a resolution by the ECC on Thursday, August 15th, 2024.

Included among these rights are the right “to flow freely, maintain its natural ecological functions and processes including the health and integrity of its waters, banks, and surrounding habitats; the right to flourish, evolve, and sustain the natural migration and spawning of fish vital to the survival of Southern Resident Orcas, a critically endangered species; the right to be protected from activities that harm its ecological balance; the right to clean and unpolluted water which is essential for the health of the river and the well-being of all species and ecosystems that rely on it.”

This resolution was passed after the ECC adopted another resolution on June 22nd, 2024, recognizing the inherent rights of the Southern Resident Orcas. Thus far, in addition to the recent resolutions adopted by the ECC, five cities and three counties in Washington have adopted proclamations recognizing the inherent rights of Southern Resident Orcas. Depoe Bay, Oregon, and Arcata, CA, have also adopted similar proclamations. Efforts by Legal Rights of the Salish Sea (LRSS) and Northwest Animal Rights Network (NARN) are being made to secure legal recognition of the inherent Rights of the Southern Resident Orcas in Washington State.

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1 **Environment and Climate Caucus Resolution ECC (2) 24-08-15**
2 **WSDCCRES -- XXX -- XXXXX -- XXX -- ENV – ESTABLISH RIGHTS OF THE SNAKE RIVER**

3 **Establish Rights of the Snake River**

4 **WHEREAS**, the Snake River is a vital watercourse that, when free-flowing, encompasses a diverse
5 and vital ecological system that includes rivers, streams, wetlands, forests, and wildlife habitats
6 essential to the health and well-being of numerous environments and species; and

7 **WHEREAS**, the Snake River is critical to the cultural heritage and livelihoods of Indigenous
8 peoples, who have long maintained a deep connection to and stewardship of the land and waters
9 within this region (1), evidenced by several Tribal and Indigenous Nations having officially
10 recognized the rights of Rivers, including the Klamath (2); Whanganui River (3); Laje River (4);
11 and,

12 **WHEREAS**, the health of the Snake River is in decline due to human caused pollution,
13 damming, over-extraction, habitat loss, and extreme temperature swings and precipitation
14 variations due to climate change, thus diminishing its capacity to support life and to provide
15 essential ecosystem benefits to dependent species and environments. (5); and,

16 **WHEREAS**, recognizing the inherent rights of rivers acknowledges the intrinsic value of nature
17 beyond its utility to humans, thus enabling enforcement of those rights in law. (6)

18 **THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED**, that the Environment and Climate Caucus of the Washington State
19 Democratic Party calls for establishing Rights of the Snake River that entitles it to flow freely,
20 maintain its natural ecological functions and processes including the health and integrity of its waters,
21 banks, and surrounding habitats; the right to flourish, evolve, and sustain the natural migration and
22 spawning of fish vital to the survival of Southern Resident Orcas, a critically endangered species (7);
23 the right to be protected from activities that harm its ecological balance; the right to clean and
24 unpolluted water which is essential for the health of the river and the well-being of all species and
25 ecosystems that rely on it,

26 **THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that as a rights holder, the Snake River will have legal
27 standing to secure representation to uphold those rights, and

28 **THEREFORE BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED**, that this resolution be forwarded to the Washington
29 State Governor and all Washington State House and Senate Democrats.

30 **References:**

31 1. Nez Perce Tribal General Council resolution recognizing the rights of the Snake River
32 <http://files.harmonywithnatureun.org/uploads/upload980.pdf>

33 2. Resolution establishing the rights of the Klamath River
34 [https://ecojurisprudence.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/US_Klamath_Resolution-Establishing-](https://ecojurisprudence.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/US_Klamath_Resolution-Establishing-Rights-of-the-Klamath-River_168.pdf)
35 [Rights-of-the-Klamath-River_168.pdf](https://ecojurisprudence.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/US_Klamath_Resolution-Establishing-Rights-of-the-Klamath-River_168.pdf)

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37 3. Te Awa Tupua (Whanganui River Claims Settlement) Act 2017

- 38 <https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2017/0007/latest/whole.html> - DLM6831613
- 39 4. The city of Guajará-Mirim in Brazil approved the first law in Brazil that recognizes the legal rights
40 of a river belonging to the Amazon region. [https://ecojurisprudence.org/wp-](https://ecojurisprudence.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Brazil-Rondonia-Rights-of-Laje-River-2.pdf)
41 [content/uploads/2023/07/Brazil-Rondonia-Rights-of-Laje-River-2.pdf](https://ecojurisprudence.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Brazil-Rondonia-Rights-of-Laje-River-2.pdf)
- 42 5. Rights of Nature: Rivers That Can Stand in Court <https://www.mdpi.com/2079-9276/7/1/13>
- 43 6. National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration National Marine Fisheries Service:
44 Rebuilding Interior Columbia Basin Salmon and Steelhead, 2022 September 30
45 [https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/resource/document/rebuilding-interior-columbia-basin-salmon-and-](https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/resource/document/rebuilding-interior-columbia-basin-salmon-and-steelhead)
46 [steelhead](https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/resource/document/rebuilding-interior-columbia-basin-salmon-and-steelhead)
- 47 7. NOAA Southern Resident Killer Whale (*Orcinus orca*). In 2005, the Southern Resident killer whale
48 was listed as endangered under the Endangered Species
49 Act. [https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/west-coast/endangered-species-conservation/southern-](https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/west-coast/endangered-species-conservation/southern-resident-killer-whale-orcinus-orca)
50 [resident-killer-whale-orcinus-orca](https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/west-coast/endangered-species-conservation/southern-resident-killer-whale-orcinus-orca)

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52 Adopted by the Environment and Climate Caucus (ECC): at its general meeting 2024 08 15