

## **WSDCCRES – 984 – 210925 – ENV – ORCA & SALMON RECOVERY**

### **SOUTHERN RESIDENT ORCA WHALE AND SALMON RECOVERY**

**WHEREAS** the Southern Resident Killer Whale (Orca) population was listed as endangered in 2005 under the Endangered Species Act and is considered depleted under the Marine Mammal Protection Act<sup>1</sup>; and Southern Resident Orcas survive almost exclusively on Chinook Salmon<sup>2</sup>, and due to the decline of Chinook many Southern Resident Orca's have been observed to be in poor physical condition and experiencing difficulty raising calves<sup>3</sup>;

**WHEREAS** salmonids require specific temperature variations and cold water river conditions during migration and spawning cycles for survival<sup>4</sup>, water temperatures in the Columbia and Snake Rivers are regulated by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) under the Clean Water Act 303(d), and Washington and Oregon, have failed to comply by exceeding temperatures for decades resulting in the decline of hundreds of thousands of salmon annually<sup>5,6,7,8</sup>;

**WHEREAS** studies by the EPA indicate dam removal and the restoration of free flowing water in the Snake River will decrease water temperatures and improve salmonid survival rates<sup>9</sup>, and in 2018 Washington State Governor Jay Inslee and the Southern Resident Killer Whale Task Force were informed by more than 30 salmon biologists that one of the key measures necessary to increase Chinook abundance from the Columbia/Snake system is to permanently restore the Snake River by removing the lower four Snake River dams (LSRD)<sup>10</sup>;

**WHEREAS** numerous cost and benefit analyses indicate sales and annual power production on the LSRDs are not economical, costing taxpayers \$17 billion over the past 30 years on unsuccessful fish recovery efforts<sup>11,12</sup>. Additionally 9 of the 24 turbines on the LSRDs have exceeded their 45-year service life, while the remaining 15 will reach their service life by 2025. Replacing all 24 turbines will cost an estimated \$1 billion<sup>13</sup>. Idaho Congressional Representative Mike Simpson's Columbia Basin Initiative includes removal of the LSRDs and outlines a sound plan that will: 1) replace the 3033 megawatts of hydropower capacity from the dams with alternative clean energy, 2) increase agricultural water efficiency, 3) replace Snake River barge traffic from Lewiston to Pasco with energy efficient rail transport, 4) enhance recreational opportunities for all. The Columbia Basin Initiative outlines an estimated \$33.5 billion dollar plan over a ten-year period, of which \$10 billion is earmarked for replacement energy generation, includes funds for returning the Snake River to its natural state.

**WHEREAS** on July 9<sup>th</sup> 2021 the Salmon Orca Summit was convened at the Squaxin Island

Reservation in Mason County WA, co-hosted by the Nez Perce Tribe and the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians representing more than 50 Indian nations calling for immediate action to save endangered Orcas and the Snake River salmon they depend on, pressing Governor Jay Inslee and elected officials to remove the LSRDs<sup>14</sup>. During that Summit Washington State Governor Inslee and Congressional Senator Patty Murray each stated dam removal on the Lower Snake River, a tributary of the Columbia, must remain on the table and a comprehensive solution quickly reached to save salmon and Orcas from extinction, and in a statement made by a video call, Inslee said work must get underway urgently to identify ways to replace the services of the dams so next steps can be taken toward a comprehensive solution for salmon recovery<sup>14</sup>;

**THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED**, that Washington State Democratic Central Committee (WSDCC) calls on the President of the United States (POTUS) and the 117th Congress to ensure that funding is set aside now in the Biden Administration's Infrastructure stimulus package for the river restoration that is the only path to the survival of the salmon and the orca that depend on them, by breaching the four lower Snake River dams and also to fund replacing the transportation, irrigation and power generation provided by the dams consistent with the goals of Idaho Republican Rep. Mike Simpson's legislative proposal; and

**THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the WSDCC thanks, and acknowledges the work and dedication of Senator Patty Murray, and Governor Jay Inslee and Congressional Representative Mike Simpson. Their work changes the conversation around salmon and orca recovery, recognizes and honors the claims of Northwest Tribes and recognizes the urgency of the situation and transforming the conversation; and

**THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the WSDCC calls upon the federal government to withdraw any court federal defense of the prior administration's flawed 2020 Columbia River System Environmental Impact Statement, Biological Opinion, and Record of Decisions as a defense of methods and conclusions that are inconsistent with the new administration's environmental and tribal principles and priorities; and

**THEREFORE BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED** that in reaffirming our commitment to Resolution 919, the WSDCC calls upon Governor Inslee, and both State and Federal Senators and Representatives to take steps to breach the lower four Snake River dams as a result of implementation of a comprehensive solution, base in science, that honors Tribal nation treaties and subsistence fisheries, centers the voices and needs of communities in the region, provides a just transition to living wage jobs, supports agricultural production and irrigation, recreation, transportation, and clean energy without diminishing protections under the Clean Water Act, Endangered Species Act, and National Environmental Policy Act or our state's ability to implement the Washington Clean Energy Transformation Act.

## **References:**

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**PASSED AT THE SEPTEMBER 25 MEETING OF THE WSDCC**