

**American Rivers • Earthjustice • Friends of the Earth • National Wildlife Federation •
Natural Resources Defense Council • Native American Rights Fund • Sierra Club**

November 28, 2011

The Honorable John E. Bryson, Secretary
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20230

The Honorable Nancy Sutley, Chair
White House Council on Environmental Quality
730 Jackson Place, NW
Washington, D.C. 20503

Dear Secretary Bryson and Chairwoman Sutley:

We are writing on behalf of our organizations' combined membership of more than 4 million to urge the Department of Commerce and the Council on Environmental Quality to play a lead role in initiating a collaborative stakeholder process to restore the wild salmon and steelhead of the Columbia and Snake Rivers. We would also like to request an in-person meeting with each of you in the coming weeks to discuss this issue in more detail.

As you know, the salmon and steelhead of the Columbia and Snake rivers are central to the Pacific Northwest's economy, heritage, environment, and quality of life. These iconic fish also help sustain the West Coast's commercial and sport fishing industries from California to Alaska and inland to Idaho. But 20 years after the listing of Snake River sockeye as endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), little progress has been made toward restoring sockeye or 12 other listed stocks of salmon and steelhead to self-sustaining, fishable populations.

In August this year, a U.S. District Court Judge ruled that the current salmon plan, or biological opinion is illegal under the ESA and ordered the federal government to develop a new plan that will protect and recover these important species. The Judge's ruling (and the two-year remand before a new plan is due) provides a unique opportunity to develop a process that can go beyond the courtroom and bring all stakeholders together at a "solutions table" to develop a comprehensive set of recommendations for Congress and the Administration. Many people and organizations – including over 1,000 business leaders from across the country – now support a broad-based, inclusive, and collaborative forum where those with a stake in salmon restoration can work alongside Tribes and federal and state agencies to explore all scientifically-sound salmon recovery options.

Because the Department of Commerce's NOAA Fisheries is the agency responsible for preparing a revised biological opinion in response to the Court's decision, because there are multiple federal action agencies, and because CEQ is in a unique position to work with all of the federal interests, your two agencies are best situated to initiate such a collaborative process. By bringing together federal agencies, Northwest states, Tribes and diverse stakeholders, you can help the region and the nation chart a science-based, cost-effective, and successful path toward recovering Columbia-

Snake Basin salmon, rebuilding jobs, and enhancing local economies. To be sure, restoring wild salmon and steelhead will not be easy, but it can happen if we seize this historic opportunity and bring stakeholders and governments together to develop a plan.

Thank you for your consideration of our request for your leadership in creating and pursuing a collaborative process to recover Columbia-Snake River salmon and steelhead. We would like to meet with you, separately or together, in the next two to three weeks to discuss this proposal further. To schedule a meeting, please contact Joy Blackwood, Green Group Program Director at 202-387-3500 ext. 3361 or jblackwood@edf.org.

Sincerely,

Frances Beinecke, President
Natural Resources Defense Council

Michael Brune, Executive Director
Sierra Club

John Echohawk, Executive Director
Native American Rights Fund

Wm. Robert Irvin, President & CEO
American Rivers

Erich Pica, President
Friends of the Earth

Larry Schweiger, President & CEO
National Wildlife Federation

Trip Van Noppen, President
Earthjustice

cc: Dr. Jane Lubchenco,
Administrator, NOAA Fisheries