

American Rivers \* Defenders of Wildlife \* Earthjustice \* Endangered Species Coalition  
Friends of the Earth \* National Wildlife Federation \* Sierra Club

April 23, 2009

Nancy Sutley  
Chair  
White House Council on Environmental Quality  
722 Jackson Place, NW  
Washington, DC 20503

Dear Ms. Sutley:

We are writing on behalf of our organizations' combined membership of millions to urge the Council on Environmental Quality to play a lead role in revisiting and substantially improving the previous administration's policies on salmon and federal dam management in the Columbia-Snake River basin. We and/or members of our senior staff are also requesting an in-person meeting with you to discuss these issues in more detail.

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 sports fishing industry from California to Alaska and inland to Idaho. But nearly 20 years after the listing of Snake River sockeye as endangered under the Endangered Species Act, little progress has been made toward restoring sockeye or 12 other listed stocks of salmon and steelhead to self-sustaining, fishable populations.

Remedying the significant legal and scientific flaws in the 2008 Biological Opinion (BiOp) for the Federal Columbia River Power System will require considerable attention from CEQ. The need for your leadership stems from the inherent complexity of managing the Columbia-Snake hydrosystem, which rests with several different federal agencies and is co-managed by states and tribes. The situation is complicated further still by the unwillingness to date of regional offices of federal agencies and the federal Bonneville Power Administration to commit to the "major overhaul" of river management practices demanded by Judge Malcolm Marsh in the mid-1990s and echoed by Judge James Redden throughout the current decade. While the system does indeed "call out for a major overhaul," the region is also in need of an honest broker; one backed by the White House.

The validity of the 2008 BiOp – the federal government's third attempt to write a legal BiOp since 2000 – is currently being challenged before Judge Redden, and many of our organizations are plaintiffs. A decision has not yet been issued, but the judge has asked the parties if they would be open to discussing a possible settlement before he rules. The environmental and fishing plaintiffs, as well as the State of Oregon and the Nez Perce and Spokane tribes, have indicated a willingness to enter into negotiations if the federal government will agree to negotiate over key issues and put all options on the table.

Those issues include, but are not limited to, the BiOp's interpretation of the Endangered Species Act's section 7 jeopardy standard and potential salmon recovery actions that could be added to the BiOp, including the removal of the four lower Snake River dams. The BiOp's jeopardy standard is one example among many attempts by the Bush Administration to weaken the Endangered Species Act. If this standard is accepted, others could point to it as precedent to argue for reduced protections that would harm the prospects of survival and recovery for hundreds of other species nationwide.

We believe that major changes to federal dam operations and river management up to and including removal of the lower Snake River dams can be accomplished in a cost-effective manner that leads to salmon recovery, protects and enhances the economy and quality of life in farming and fishing communities, and is compatible with broader regional and national efforts to substantially reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Many scientists have asserted that the salmon recovery bottleneck created by these four dams cannot be offset by offsite habitat improvements, as much of the tributary habitat for Snake River salmon and steelhead is already in pristine or near-pristine federally protected wilderness and roadless areas. The majority of scientific opinion holds that removing the lower Snake River dams is the most certain, and perhaps the only way to restore wild Snake River salmon and steelhead.

Thank you for considering taking a leadership role in identifying a new, successful strategy to recover Columbia-Snake River salmon and steelhead, and for considering our request to meet with you to discuss this issue in more detail. To schedule a meeting, please contact Michael Garrity at American Rivers at 206-213-0330, ext. 11.

Sincerely,

Rebecca R. Wodder  
President  
American Rivers

Rodger Schlickeisen  
President  
Defenders of Wildlife

Trip Van Noppen  
President  
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