

NEW FEDERAL COMMITMENTS TO FIGHT SALMON EXTINCTION IN THE COLUMBIA RIVER BASIN

Salmon are a critical part of the ecosystems, cultures, and economies of the Pacific Northwest. This is especially true for Tribal nations who have depended on these species since time immemorial. But salmon in the Columbia and Snake River Basin, once the largest salmon-producing river basin in the lower 48, are now on the brink of extinction, largely due to the impacts of federal dams on the Columbia and Snake Rivers. Thanks to the leadership of six regional sovereigns and a coalition of conservation and fishing organizations, the Biden Administration is now taking the first substantial steps towards a comprehensive solution that would save salmon from extinction and honor Tribal treaty obligations.

The **United States Government Commitments**, developed as part of a lengthy mediation process, pledge the federal government to continued support for the recovery of healthy and abundant salmon populations in the Columbia River Basin, provide significant federal funding to the Northwest, assist region-wide efforts and planning to address climate change, and set the region on a path to breach the four lower Snake River dams. They also form the basis of a multi-year stay of the long-running litigation led by a coalition of conservation and fishing groups, providing a period of certainty to the region as the actions begin to be implemented.

This is a significant turning point in the decades-long fight to protect and restore salmon populations in the Columbia River Basin. The Biden Administration's commitments respond directly to a groundbreaking joint proposal from the "Six Sovereigns": the states of Washington and Oregon and the four Lower Columbia River Treaty Tribes (the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Spring Reservation, and the Nez Perce Tribe). The Six Sovereigns' **Columbia Basin Restoration Initiative** or **CBRI** is a visionary and comprehensive roadmap to rebuild imperiled fish populations, honor Tribal treaty rights, and restore healthy ecosystems while supporting a robust Pacific Northwest economy. With continued engagement from the Biden Administration, Northwest Congressional Delegation, and regional stakeholders, we can turn the CBRI into reality. The recently announced United States Government Commitments in support of the CBRI include:

INVESTING IN NORTHWEST ECOSYSTEMS AND ECONOMIES

This package includes more than half a billion dollars in previously unannounced federal investments for the Northwest over the coming decade. Much of this funding will be either distributed directly to the Six Sovereigns or spent in close coordination with them and other regional sovereigns.

- The funding includes hundreds of millions of dollars for habitat restoration/protection and hatchery improvements for salmon, steelhead, and other native fish and shellfish.
- It also includes commitments to fund clean energy projects and plans to offer funding to improve infrastructure such as culverts and fish passage at dams.
- OMB and federal agencies have also pledged to continue working with regional sovereigns to support the Northwest's ability to secure future funding.

TAKING ACTION TO ENABLE DAM BREACHING

The actions and commitments announced by the United States include – for the first time – direct federal support for work to replace the lower Snake River dams' services and prepare for a decision to breach them.

- Federal agencies, in close partnership with ongoing efforts spearheaded by Washington state, will provide funding and federal expertise to analyze how to replace the energy, transportation, recreation, and irrigation services provided by the dams.
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- In addition, DOI will conduct an analysis of the impacts that the dams have had on tribal treaty and other rights that depend on healthy and harvestable salmon, providing a comprehensive acknowledgement from the federal government of the dams' profound negative effects on every aspect of these Tribes' way of life.
 - By fall 2024, the agencies will determine whether and how to revise the Trump-era environmental compliance documents that include operation of the lower Snake River dams and finalize any new decision and supporting documents (BiOp, EIS, and ROD) by spring 2026.

ADVANCING OUR CLIMATE GOALS

The package also includes actions to quickly deploy clean, extinction-free power generation, keep energy prices affordable, and support the resiliency of stakeholders across the region.

- The federal government will provide technical assistance, funding, and other support to enable the four Lower Columbia River Treaty Tribes to develop at least 1-3 GW of new clean energy resources, which will be planned as replacement energy for the lower Snake River dams.
- The Pacific Northwest National Laboratory will conduct a Regional Energy Needs Planning Process to identify how to decarbonize the Northwest's grid while accounting for breaching the lower Snake River Dams.
- DOE and BPA have also agreed to accelerate clean energy transition efforts in the Northwest to enable replacement of the energy services of the dams and meet the region's broader decarbonization goals.

CONTINUING PARTNERSHIPS OVER SHARED OBJECTIVES

In responding directly to the Six Sovereigns' Columbia Basin Restoration Initiative, the United States Government has pledged to continue the close collaboration established between federal, state, and tribal governments over their shared priorities.

- This includes an acknowledgement from the federal government that, consistent with the science, urgent action is needed to rebuild healthy and abundant salmon and that achieving this goal needs to include breaching the four lower Snake River dams as an essential action.
- It also means that senior administration officials will continue to work in partnership with the Six Sovereigns and lead these efforts on behalf of the federal government.

ESTABLISHING INTERIM DAM OPERATIONS

The United States Government Commitments include a set of interim hydropower system operations that will remain in place for as long as 10 years provided that the federal government continues to work with the Six Sovereigns and conservation plaintiffs in the coming years while planning to replace the services of the lower Snake River dams so that they can be breached.

- These plans include increases in spring spill and adding some fall and winter spill, which will benefit some salmon species, such as spring/summer Chinook.
- However, they also include reductions in late summer spill, which will harm some salmon species such as fall Chinook but allow BPA to generate more power during lucrative periods when the hydrosystem typically struggles to meet demand.
- These operational changes include significant compromises made with the expectation that the region will continue to move down the path towards dam breaching and are designed to stay in place until that time.

The actions and commitments outlined above represent a considerable first step for the region. We must continue to move towards breaching the dams with urgency to address the extinction crisis and rebuild fish populations. With the leadership of the Six Sovereigns, commitments from the Biden Administration, and support from the Northwest Congressional Delegation, the Northwest can achieve the comprehensive solution that salmon, Tribes, and regional economies need.
