



Snake River Restoration

We have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to lead the largest salmon and river restoration in history while creating a more resilient and just Northwest future—but we must act now.

With strong political leadership and strategic investments, we can restore a free-flowing lower Snake River, recover salmon, steelhead, and orca populations, uphold our Nations' commitments to Northwest Tribes, ensure clean and affordable energy for communities, and maintain our region's agricultural legacy.



Our region and Nation have an obligation to uphold the legally-binding treaties and other commitments made to Northwest Tribes.

- Many Tribes throughout the Columbia River Basin consider themselves “[Salmon People](#)” whose cultures and identities are deeply interconnected with the salmon that sustain them. If salmon disappear, the impact on Native cultures and economies is incalculable.¹
- Northwest Tribal Nations including the Nez Perce, Yakama Nation, Warm Springs and Umatilla, as well as the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians (ATNI) and National Congress of American Indians (NCAI), have fought for decades to prevent salmon extinction and have been consistently strong in their position on salmon and river restoration.



“ ATNI supports and thanks all the leaders who have heard the voices of the ATNI tribes.... [for their efforts] in moving the Northwest towards the bold actions that will be needed for salmon and river restorations in the Columbia Basin...”

– [2023 - 14 ATNI RESOLUTION](#)³



“ For our people to survive, we need salmon. Without salmon, there can be no Salmon People. We have a sacred relationship with—and obligation to—the salmon populations that call Nch’í Wána (Columbia River) home.”

– **GERALD LEWIS**, Chairman of the Tribal Council of Yakama Nation;
KAT BRIGHAM, Chair of the Board of Trustees of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation;
JONATHAN W. SMITH, SR., Chairman of the Tribal Council of the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon; and
SHANNON F. WHEELER, Chairman of the Nez Perce Tribal Executive Committee in a [joint op-ed](#)²

Snake River salmon and steelhead are in peril today.

- Almost half of Snake River salmon and steelhead populations have reached near-extinction thresholds, according to a 2021 analysis by [Nez Perce Tribe fishery scientists](#).⁴
- NOAA determined dam breaching is “essential” and a “centerpiece action” to recover Snake River salmon populations in its [Rebuilding Interior Columbia Basin Salmon and Steelhead](#) report.⁵



“The orca are the first people of this place, and need salmon protection now if they are to survive. They need something to eat.”

— **LEONARD FORSMAN**,
chairperson of the Suquamish Tribe
and president of the Affiliated Tribes
of Northwest Indians

The Southern Resident orcas, who depend on salmon for food, are also on the brink of extinction.

- Chinook salmon are the primary food source for the endangered Southern Resident orcas, accounting for 50% - 100% of their diet depending on the season.⁶
- Columbia River Basin Chinook, specifically, account for more than half of the Chinook consumed by the Southern Residents while they’re in coastal waters.⁶
- Lack of Chinook salmon is the primary threat to the survival of the Southern Resident orcas. As fewer salmon return to the ocean, these iconic orcas are starving and their population has declined to a record low—with a current population of only 75 individuals.



Restoring a cold water, free-flowing lower Snake River would build climate resilience throughout the Columbia and Snake River Basins.

- Climate change is heating up our rivers and exacerbating the toll that the dams—and the hot water, slow-moving reservoirs they create—have on endangered fish populations.
- Throughout the summer—when some Columbia and Snake River salmon populations are migrating back to their spawning grounds—the water impounded behind the dams frequently reaches water temperatures that are [lethally hot for salmon](#)—exceeding 68°F.⁷
- The Snake River Basin represents 50% of the cold water habitat on the West Coast and mile-for-mile contains the coldest, most undisturbed stream habitats in the continental US. Restoring the lower Snake River is our Nation’s greatest opportunity for salmon recovery.⁸
- Removing the four lower Snake River dams would reconnect endangered salmon and steelhead to 5,000 miles of pristine, protected, high-elevation habitat—increasing the Basin’s resiliency in the face of a warming climate, and providing salmon and steelhead with a real chance to recover to healthy and abundant populations.



**Stop
Salmon
Extinction**



Snake River Restoration | **Habitat**

Salmon Habitat in the Northwest

Half of
all available
salmon habitat
in lower 48
states

**Columbia & Snake
River Basin**

**Salmon habitat available
in Snake River basin**

- Tribal land
- Major city
- Dam



Salmon recovery and the restoration of the lower Snake River would provide economic benefits to communities throughout the Columbia and Snake River Basins—and beyond.

- In recent years, poor salmon and steelhead returns have resulted in unprecedented fishing closures and rule changes on the Columbia and Snake Rivers and their tributaries. These closures have had significant impacts on the sport and tribal fisheries—threatening many businesses and tribal communities.
- Restoring a free-flowing lower Snake River would provide opportunities for ecological and [economic revitalization](#) through the reclamation and redevelopment of a restored river benefiting the ecosystem, wildlife, and communities.⁹



We can and must affordably, efficiently, and urgently replace the services currently provided by the four lower Snake River dams.

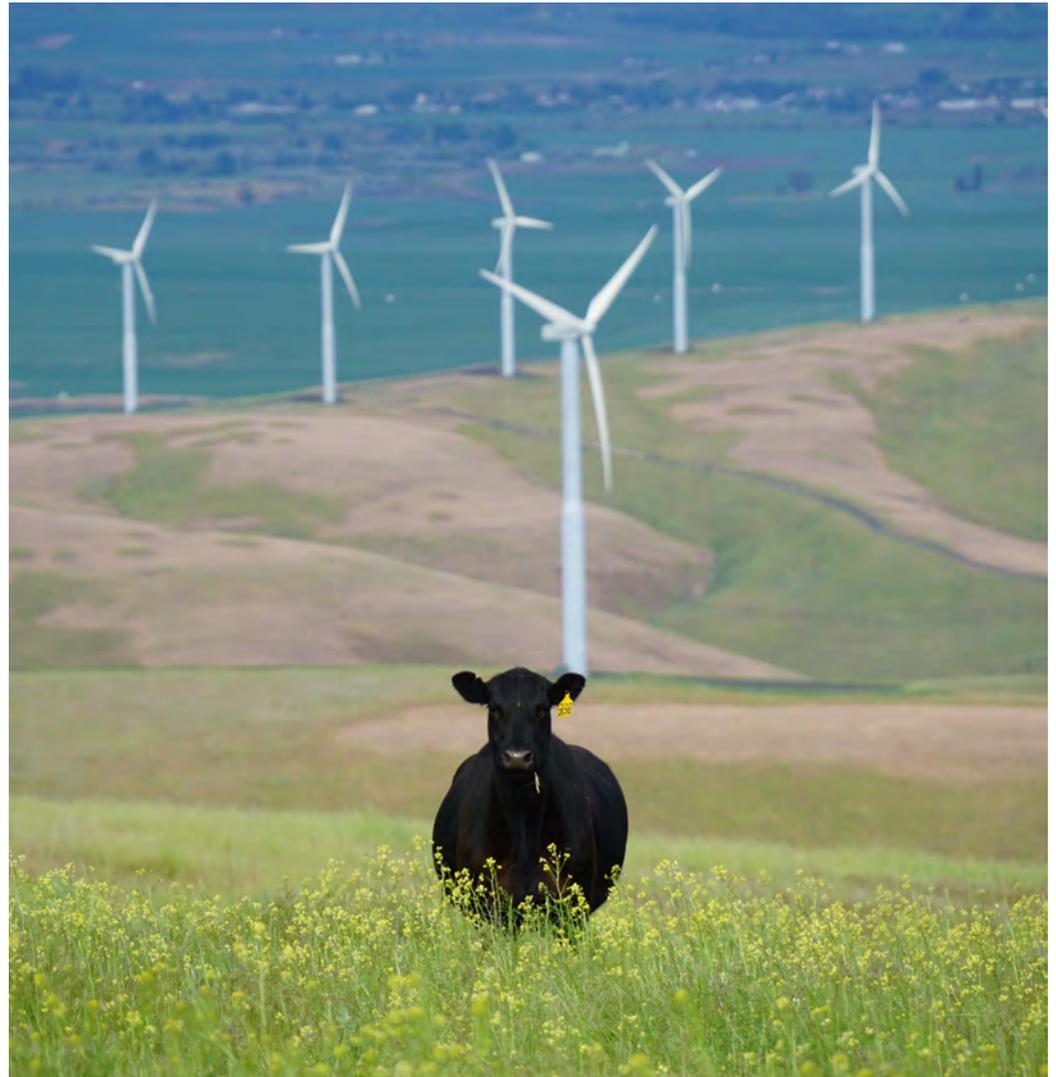
- The energy benefits of the four lower Snake River dams are replaceable with affordable, clean, and reliable alternatives. A [portfolio of clean energy alternatives](#) will modernize our energy grid and improve certainty and reliability in the face of a changing climate and energy market, all while maintaining affordability for ratepayers.¹⁰
- Bonneville Power Administration is holding back regional progress on both climate and salmon restoration. Members of Congress must hold BPA accountable to a strong, reliable energy future. BPA's policy and procurement decisions must focus on developing and supporting clean, non-hydro power resources and transmission to replace lower Snake River dam power.
- The clean energy transition is already underway—and poised to rapidly accelerate. In response to state clean energy requirements, utilities are already committing to new projects, with many more in the pipeline.
- Lower Snake River power generation is highly seasonal: [51% of the LSR dams' annual output is from March to June](#), when the rest of the system is also producing significant output—often in excess of customer demand. Clean energy resources can replace and improve on these energy services, providing more output in summer and winter, when power is actually needed, resulting in better year-round reliability.¹¹





With smart investments and strategic upgrades, we can replace the irrigation and transportation services currently provided by the lower Snake River dams.

- The four dams were built to turn Lewiston, Idaho into a seaport. That hasn't worked and over the last several decades barging has been in steep decline. Businesses no longer ship petroleum or lentils/peas by barge—wheat is moved downriver and fertilizer components (and the occasional wind turbine) are moved upriver.
- Most Washington wheat (67%) arrives at the deepwater ocean ports at the mouth of the Columbia by rail. The area near the Snake River that ships wheat by barge shipped their wheat by rail before the dams were built. We can (re)establish grain elevators and rail closer to wheat farms, reducing truck miles and costs to farmers. The State of Washington is already at work developing transportation replacement plans.
- Roughly 53,000 acres of farmland are irrigated from the reservoir behind Ice Harbor Dam. Washington is identifying alternatives for irrigation during drawdown and determining the best approach to continued irrigation after the river drops 100 feet to continue important agricultural production.





We have historical momentum and growing political support for a comprehensive solution to recover healthy and abundant salmon throughout the Northwest.

- Representative Simpson demonstrated strong leadership in outlining the comprehensive [Columbia Basin Initiative](#) in February 2021 and is continuing to advocate for salmon recovery in Congress.¹²
- Senator Cantwell and other leaders fought to secure a [\\$2.8 billion investment](#) in the 2021 bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act for salmon and ecosystem restoration projects.¹³
- Senator Murray and Governor Inslee’s 2022 [report](#)¹⁴ and [recommendations](#)¹⁵ concluded that salmon extinction is “categorically unacceptable” and established that we must act now to make breaching the lower Snake River dams viable.
- In the 2023 legislative session, Governor Inslee and the Washington State legislature approved [\\$7.5 million to plan](#) for the replacement of transportation, irrigation, and energy services currently provided by the lower Snake River dams.¹⁶
- On September 27, President Biden released a [Presidential Memorandum](#) that firmly establishes health and abundant salmon recovery as a federal priority and directs federal agencies to take the necessary action to recover salmon and uphold the treaty and trust responsibilities made to Northwest Tribes.¹⁷



“Salmon are absolutely essential for our environment, our economy, and Pacific Northwest Tribes – and ensuring we are making real federal investments in salmon recovery has long been a top priority for me. As Chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee, I’m going to fight for the strongest possible investments to save our salmon.”

– SENATOR PATTY MURRAY (WA-D)
on President Biden’s [Presidential Memorandum](#)¹⁷



Snake River Restoration | Our Once-in-a-lifetime Opportunity

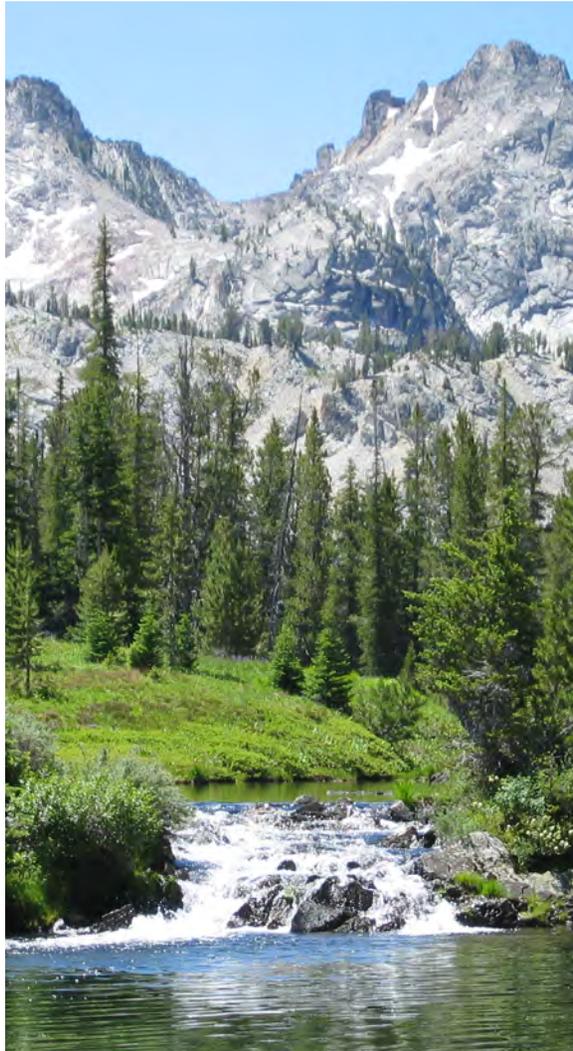
We cannot miss this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to lead the largest river and salmon restoration in history and create a more resilient Northwest.

- Members of Congress, state legislatures, and federal agencies must work together with Tribal leaders and impacted parties to develop and implement solutions that work for salmon and orca, Northwest Tribes, regional economies, and communities.



Supporting Organizations





Find links to these sources as well as more information at [NWOpportunity.org](https://www.nwopportunity.org)



Sources

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- ¹⁰ NW Energy Coalition, *Lower Snake River Dam Replacement Study, Energy Strategies*, May 20, 2022
- ¹¹ NW Energy Coalition, *Smart Planning Will Drive Replacing the Power form Lower Snake River Dams*, February 22, 2022
- ¹² Idaho Congressman Mike Simpson, *Columbia Basin Initiative, The Northwest in Transition*, February 2021.
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- ¹⁶ Washington State Senator Claudia Kauffman, *Special to The Seattle Times, Salmon restoration is a matter of ecological, cultural survival*, June 12, 2023
- ¹⁷ The White House, Briefing Room, *Memorandum on Restoring Healthy and Abundant Salmon, Steelhead, and Other Native Fish Populations in the Columbia River Basin*, September 27, 2023.