



July 19, 2021

The Honorable Mike Simpson
United States House of Representatives
2084 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representative Simpson,

On behalf of Western Leaders Network, a nonpartisan nonprofit organization of 450 local and tribal elected officials across the Interior West, we write in support of a matter of utmost importance to tribes, economies, and the environment: salmon restoration in the Interior West and Pacific Northwest. This is an urgent and momentous opportunity to work toward recovering endangered wild salmon and steelhead populations while also strengthening the Inland Northwest's energy system, transportation system and economy.

The new Administration and the 117th Congress face a watershed moment in history with an opportunity to secure congressional funding for salmon recovery and river restoration throughout the Northwest through the Columbia Basin Initiative.

Your bipartisan proposal would be an ideal component of the national infrastructure bill, and there is broad support for the proposal among businesses, organizations, tribes, elected officials and other stakeholders. We agree that salmon recovery should be considered a pressing concern of this Administration and Congress, because it aligns with the Administration's conservation and clean energy principles and priorities. The Columbia Basin Initiative presents a comprehensive package that will not only address the imminent salmon extinction crisis, but also restore inland salmon and steelhead-dependent economies and secure an affordable and reliable clean energy future for generations to come.

Until recently, most other members of Congress and statewide elected officials in the Northwest avoided the topic of Columbia and Snake River salmon protection and restoration activities and let federal agencies lead. As you know, this has resulted in \$17 billion spent over the past 30 years; [five inadequate and illegal federal salmon plans](#); and 13 populations of salmon and steelhead protected under the Endangered Species Act at risk of extinction, largely due to the four lower Snake River dams ([Nat'l Wildlife Fed'n v. Nat'l Marine Fisheries Serv.](#)). Your proposal includes \$33 billion to remove these dams and invest in a set of Northwest inland communities, mitigation measures, and infrastructure that would be impacted by this transition to a free-flowing river, including riverside communities, the energy grid, irrigation and barge transportation.

Western Leaders Network

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Salmon and steelhead are still hanging on, but without major change, costly litigation cycles, ineffectual salmon restoration efforts, [broken treaty and trust responsibilities to Tribes](#) (*United States v. Washington*) loss of a multi-billion dollar natural economic resource supporting tens of thousands of jobs, and increasing energy and economic insecurity will continue to persist in the Northwest.

Here in the Interior West, our farming, ranching and tribal communities and our outdoor recreation economies are central to our culture as well as our quality of life. A significant federal infrastructure investment in alternative energy and transportation would provide a unique opportunity to restore salmon populations, keep local economies whole and preserve the West's many cultures.

Thank you for your leadership in bringing forward this initiative to assist and collaborate with the relevant stakeholders and generate the necessary vision and momentum to achieve salmon recovery. This initiative serves as an important starting point for a comprehensive, sustainable revisioning of the Inland Northwest and the Columbia River Basin with improved infrastructure and technology. The Columbia Basin Initiative proposes a better future for the Northwest through precisely targeted river restoration and salmon recovery; intensive investment in new clean energy, infrastructure and technology; and long-term litigation resolution and legal certainty.

Sincerely,



Elise Jones
Board Chair



Gwen Lachelt
Executive Director