

[Orca Network Facebook response to Gov. Brown's letter to Gov. Inslee.](#)

February 17, 2020

For over twenty years members of J, K, and L pods of the Southern Resident orca population have not found enough of the food they have relied on for thousands of years: Chinook salmon. Since at least 1995 these powerful, magnificent orcas have been increasingly nutritionally stressed to the point of starvation and early death, and most injurious, over two thirds of their pregnancies now fail to produce viable young.

For those of us closely involved in field studies of orcas in the Salish Sea it was clear by 1999, after 20% of their community was lost, that the main cause of their hardship and decline was the lack of sufficient Chinook salmon in their traditional habitat - primarily Washington's inland waters and Pacific coast continental shelf - where those salmon tend to travel on their way to the Columbia River basin to spawn new generations.

Thus our attention was drawn to the four lower Snake River dams that block migrations of the most abundant runs of those salmon, especially the downstream flow of vulnerable young smolts from the vast wilderness river systems of central Idaho, held in overheated reservoirs, unable to complete their sacred life cycles.

The issues involved in removing those four dams are complex and variable, to the point that a clear sense of what's right and what's wrong can seem nearly impossible to find, but when the effects of the dams are considered in the context of the timeless pulses of salmon's biological imperatives to spawn, migrate to the sea, grow to full size then migrate upstream to spawn again, it's clear that the dams have been steadily killing salmon since they were built in the 60s and 70s. And by killing salmon the dams are killing So. Resident orcas.

The facts of the matter may seem endless but they are compelling and undeniable once the scope of the problem comes into focus, and yet well-funded and highly organized public denial campaigns have been waged since before the dams were built to justify them and obscure the harm they do.

This week we see that tussle between facts and fakery come to the surface on the occasion of a courageous and compassionate letter from Oregon Governor Kate Brown, addressed to Washington Governor Jay Inslee, stating that "The imperilment of Southern Resident Killer Whales is a tragedy shared by all of us in the Pacific Northwest, and Oregon stands with you to boldly address those factors contributing to their demise." Gov. Brown goes on to say: "The science is clear that removing the earthen portions of the four lower Snake River dams is the most certain and robust solution to Snake River salmon and steelhead recovery."

The reaction by those who benefit from federal funding to maintain the dams (the dams don't generate revenue) has been swift and blunt. "Brown's letter outraged Washington state's three Republican U.S. House members, who want to keep the dams," the Tri-City Herald reported. "Gov. Brown's position is not only misguided, it is shocking and extreme," said the Reps. The Associated Press complained that among other disputable claims, the dams provide flood control, which they do not. This is the level of smoke blown in the faces of those who wish to restore the Snake River and its vast wilderness, including those miraculous high-altitude salmon, and our beloved and irreplaceable Southern Resident orcas.

See Gov. Brown's full letter to Gov. Inslee here:

http://www.orcanetwork.org/Main/PDF/02.11.20_Inslee%20letter%20_Orca%20restoration.pdf

A new EIS to guide management of the Columbia Basin will be released this month, followed by 45 days of public comment. Please call your US Representative to advocate Snake River dam removals.