

For Immediate Release: Legislature Funds Key Orca Task Force Recommendation to address community needs

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Snake River Forum will convene stakeholders to collaboratively develop a contingency plan

SEATTLE, April 28, 2019 — With support from Governor Inslee and 43 lawmakers in the House and Senate, the Washington State legislature included funding in its final state budget to convene a stakeholder forum recommended last fall by the Governor's Southern Resident Orca Recovery Task Force. The forum represents a critical next step to bring stakeholders together to proactively identify and detail the needs of communities in the event the federal government decides to remove four dams on the lower Snake River to protect salmon and help orca facing extinction today.

"We are extraordinarily grateful that the legislature followed Governor Inslee's lead to begin urgently-needed contingency planning if federal agencies decide dam removal is necessary to restore our salmon and orcas," said Sam Mace, Inland Northwest program director for the Save Our Wild Salmon Coalition. "We look forward to working with Governor Inslee and stakeholders in the state to move this critical dialogue forward in 2019."

Restoring abundant salmon populations to the Columbia-Snake River Basin has important implications for communities along the lower Snake River as well as tribal, commercial and recreational fishing communities upstream and downstream who have long suffered from reduced fisheries due to the dams' and reservoirs' devastating effects on Northwest native fish.

Mace added: "This good news is particularly well-timed given Congressman Mike Simpson's (R-ID) announcement last week to work with others in our region to find effective ways to address Bonneville Power Administration's serious financial challenges and the plight of endangered wild salmon and steelhead. We are encouraged to see leadership emerging in both states. The problems facing salmon, orca and energy in the Northwest can't wait."

Last Tuesday in Boise, Idaho Congressman Mike Simpson announced his commitment to restoring salmon to Idaho in keynote comments at a day-long conference on salmon, energy and communities [<https://www.boisestate.edu/sps-andruscenter/2019-environmental-conference/>]. He and his staff are "asking hard questions" and working with affected stakeholders to identify options for replacing the services currently provided by these dams in the event that they need to be removed. Representative Simpson noted that the financial challenges facing the Bonneville Power Administration and steep decline of salmon stocks that return to Idaho are becoming more urgent to his constituents in Idaho. He emphasized the need for the Northwest to address these inter-related problems or run the risk that "someone else will write it and impose it upon us."

A stakeholder-led discussion that examines the economic and social costs, benefits and tradeoffs of restoring the lower Snake River by removing its four dams has never occurred in Washington or other Northwest states.

"For decades, our elected officials have avoided the difficult conversations we need to have about the lower Snake River dams and their impact on salmon and orcas," said Robb Krehbiel, Northwest representative for Defenders of Wildlife and member of the Southern Resident Orca Task Force. "Bringing people together to work collaboratively on solutions that help salmon, orca and our communities is the right next step. Time is not on our side. Salmon and orca advocates are very grateful to the Orca Task Force, Governor Inslee and the legislature for recognizing this need and supporting this much-needed conversation."

"Commercial fishermen like me look forward to the opportunity to participate in this dialogue. Fishermen and farmers have a lot in common. Now is the time for food producers from both sides of the state to begin work together on solutions that work for both communities," said salmon fisherman Amy Grondin, who, with her husband, co-owns Duna Fisheries in Port Townsend. "For too long, farmers and fishermen have been pitted against each other and this must change. We all want to make a living and do our jobs and we need real solutions that help make this possible. Our communities need to

work together to develop an action plan regardless of what the government decides—dams in or dams out."

"Funding Snake River stakeholder discussions is critical for Washington communities to assure their voice is heard and interests addressed if the four lower Snake River dams must be removed - which the science shows is essential for salmon and orca," said Bill Arthur, Sierra Club Salmon Campaign Coordinator. "This is a great complement to Congressman Simpson's comments recently at the Andrus Center Conference in Idaho. It is gratifying to see Washington and Idaho step up and begin to look at solutions that can work for communities while taking actions essential for salmon and orca."