****

**PRESS RELEASE**

***Contact: Kayeloni Scott***

***Telephone:208.621.4772***

***Email:*** ***kayelonis@nezperce.org*** **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

***Website:*** [***www.***nezperce.org](http://www.nezperce.org) **July 1, 2021**

**Tribes Across the Country Unite Around**

**Lower Snake River Dam Breaching and Orca Recovery Needs**

Washington, DC — At the conclusion of the mid-year meeting of the National Congress of American Indians, Tribal Nations from across the country joined forces with Tribes from the Pacific Northwest in calling for the breaching of the four Lower Snake River Dams in eastern Washington and for an immediate commitment from the Administration on the resources necessary to recover both Pacific Northwest salmon and Southern Resident Killer Whales (“Orcas”). The National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) passed resolution AK-21-009 which lays out this call to action and support for the proposed Columbia Basin Initiative (CBI) that Congressman Mike Simpson (R-ID) unveiled several months ago.

“It should be clear to the Administration and Northwest delegation that Tribal Nations across America stand united on the need to remove these obstacles that are choking our rivers and causing the extinction of salmon and orca,” said Fawn Sharp, NCAI President. “We can no longer stand by and wait for action. Now is the time to ensure that there are resources available to make real changes. Now is the time to restore the Snake River to its free-flowing nature. Now is the time, Mr. President, to honor the treaties that your nation made with ours.”

Building from a comprehensive analysis completed by fisheries biologists at the Nez Perce Tribe, the NCAI resolution emphasized “the very real and imminent salmon extinction crisis.” Analysis shows that wild salmon in the Snake River Basin are headed for extinction unless imminent action is taken to restore the Snake River. Every population of salmon in the Basin is at or below extinction thresholds, meaning that without the breaching of the four Lower Snake River Dams, these salmon will soon go extinct.

“The salmon are a life source that we all depend on, in more ways than one,” said Nez Perce Tribe Chairman, Samuel Penney. “We will continue to fight for their survival together because just as we are united with each other, we are also united with the salmon; we are all salmon people. We are here speaking for the salmon and upholding our commitment to them as they have done, and continue to try to do, for us. We call on President Biden and Congressional leaders to join with us in this effort.”

The NCAI resolution calls on the Biden Administration to undertake four actions: (1) ensure funding is set aside now to implement actions necessary for salmon and orca recovery, including breaching the four Lower Snake River Dams; (2) prioritize and fund Tribal species restoration actions; (3) withdraw their legal defense of the Trump Administration’s salmon plan; and (4) meet with Tribes at a Tribal Salmon and Orca Summit to discuss next steps in the protection of salmon and orca.

“We are at a critical junction – with an historic opportunity before us,” said Leonard Forsman, President of the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians and Chairman of the Suquamish Tribe. “We are asking the U.S. government take hold of this opportunity with us and save the salmon and orca of the Northwest, therefore honoring its commitments to Tribal Nations. The U.S. has a responsibility to honor the Treaties and preserve the salmon runs so vital to our culture and traditional economies. We are asking that the President and Congress keep its word and make the investments needed to prevent extinction of these salmon species. This historic moment requires more from everyone—bigger thinking, bolder action, and a willingness to do what’s right and what’s needed—for the rivers, the fish, and the Tribal peoples who have depended on both.”
As President Biden works to move an infrastructure package through Congress, Tribal leaders call on him to ensure that Tribal priorities are also included in that package. Funding to restore the Lower Snake River and invest in tribal restoration priorities throughout the Northwest are critical needs, Tribal leaders said, for the recovery and survival of salmon and orca in the region. The Columbia Basin Initiative, which the NCAI resolution supports, calls for $33 billion in investments in new clean energy, transportation infrastructure, economic development and research, and salmon conservation actions—including restoring the Lower Snake River by breaching the four Lower Snake River Dams.

“Today—in the face of aging energy infrastructure, depressed local economies, climate change, and ever-declining fish runs—we must do something different to preserve our way of life,” said Shannon Wheeler, Nez Perce Tribe Vice-Chairman. “Congressman Simpson’s proposal will build a better, stronger Northwest. We have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to build that grand vision now; to restore salmon and orca for our children and grandchildren; to increase our energy security and rural economies; and to honor Tribal Treaties across the Northwest. We call on you, Mr. President, to stand with us to protect what we all hold dear – our history, our culture, our families.”

###