

PRESS RELEASE

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Northwest Tribes Call on Biden Administration & Congress to Take Bold Action to Recover Snake River Salmon & Orcas

Historic Salmon Orca Summit Further Unites Northwest Tribal Nations & Sets Stage for National Engagement

Shelton, WA— Gathering on the homelands of the Squaxin Island Tribe in western Washington, dozens of Northwest Tribal leaders united at an historic Salmon Orca Summit to call on President Biden and Congressional leadership to “take bold action, now” to restore Snake River salmon and Southern Resident Killer Whales. The tribes once again stressed the immediate need for funding in the infrastructure bill to ensure the removal of the four Lower Snake River dams in eastern Washington as well as the additional actions necessary to restore orca.

“The fragmentation of the Snake and Columbia rivers is one of the most destructive things we’re doing to our planet, and our people are paying the price,” said Chairman Chris Peters, Squaxin Island Tribe. “Our future generations won’t care about the money we spend to fix this. This is not a money issue. It is a human issue. It is about rebuilding and protecting our communities. We have the power as a collective to make this change – to achieve this bold action. Let us leave a legacy for which we can be proud. The time is now.”

The historic event was co-hosted by the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians (ATNI) and the Nez Perce Tribe after a resolution passed by the more than 50 ATNI member tribes called for the summit. The resolution also supported fully funding the Columbia Basin Initiative (CBI) that Congressman Mike Simpson (R-ID) unveiled several months ago calling for the removal of the four Lower Snake River dams, for protecting orcas, and for no longer defending in court the illegal Trump Administration salmon plan. Tribal leaders from the Salish Sea to the Inland Northwest met together to discuss next steps for moving this issue forward to ensure the resources for these necessary actions.

“We are all salmon people. But unfortunately, we are all also united by the fact that we’re not fishing anymore,” stated Leonard Forsman, Chairman of the Suquamish Indian Nation and President of ATNI. “We’re all in this together; this is really about the preservation of Salmon People. We have no time to wait. Now is the time to create the groundswell necessary to protect our salmon, our orca, and our people.”

Throughout the two-day event, representatives from the Northwest delegation, including Rep. Mike Simpson (R-ID) and Earl Blumenauer (D-OR), representatives from the Biden Administration, Governor Kate Brown from Oregon, and Governor Jay Inslee from Washington joined Tribal leaders to listen to tribal views on the importance of salmon and orca, and to reflect on those views. Rep. Blumenauer called the removal of the four Lower Snake River dams a “bold, but necessary action” and Governor Brown added a call for fully funding the CBI.

“While we have a similar goal – the preservation of a species – we have different motivations,” said Rep. Simpson. “This is not just about saving salmon for you; this is about saving a history, a culture, and religion. It’s about saving a way of life. Your way of life. And, I stand with you.”

ATNI leaders brought their resolution to the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI), which passed NCAI on June 24, 2021. The NCAI resolution, like the ATNI resolution, stated the urgency of the situation and called for the removal of the four Lower Snake River dams and the funding necessary to take that action and additional actions necessary to recover Puget Sound orcas. It also calls for another Salmon-Orca Summit in Washington, DC.

“The time for action is now,” said William Frank III, Chairman of the Nisqually Tribe. “We will face the extinction of our salmon, of our culture, of our people. We are Salmon People and we are residents of the Pacific Northwest. We know we can find a comprehensive solution that will remove dams and build a stronger, more resilient Northwest for all.”

“You might wonder why the Puyallup Tribe is here today. We are here to show you that we stand with you on this issue,” stated Sylvia Miller, Chairwoman of the Puyallup tribe. “We stand together. We stand strong. We stand united. And we will continue to fight with you to recover our salmon and orca.”

Closing the summit, Shannon Wheeler, Vice-Chairman of the Nez Perce Tribe, vowed to continue this effort. “As we move forward across the nation bringing these issues to Washington, DC, to President Biden, we will continue to speak for the salmon, for the lamprey, for the orca. It is the right thing to do; it is the necessary thing to do; and we will be successful in recovering our salmon.”

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