

March 2, 2016

The President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20500

Re: It Costs More to Kill Snake River Salmon than to Save Them—Need for Immediate
Implementation of Breaching the Four Lower Snake River Dams

Dear Mr. President:

On May 27, 2015 you met with a small group of people in Florida. You told the group they should not ask you to do something that required an act of Congress, because that would not work. In the meeting Dr. Gary Weiss discussed the critically endangered Southern Resident Killer Whales of the Pacific Northwest and presented you a letter detailing their plight, attached. He then asked you to take executive action to breach the four Lower Snake River dams in Washington State to provide more prey for the food limited whales. This action can be accomplished without new Congressional authorization or appropriations. **You said "this looks like something we might be able to do. I will get back to you after my and my staff's review."**

Dr. Weiss' request came on the heels of a May 2015 NOAA Fisheries report in which NOAA spotlighted the orcas as one of the eight most endangered species it protects, stating that they would go extinct in the immediate future, if action to save them were not taken rapidly. Dr. Weiss informed you that the key factor to the Southern Resident orca's extinction or survival was the availability of Chinook salmon, their preferred prey and approximately 80% of their diet. He told you that breaching the four lower Snake River dams held the most potential for producing Chinook quickly enough to sustain the whales. After more than two and a half years without a surviving calf, in the last 15 months, the Southern Residents are celebrating the addition of eight calves to their population. If these calves are to survive, they need Chinook salmon. Historically, the Snake River was a huge source of Chinook for the orcas. The four lower Snake River dams are the single biggest reason that the already greatly diminished salmon runs on the lower Snake River are listed as threatened endangered under the Endangered Species Act. To be sure: over-fishing, the impacts of hatchery fish competing for food and degrading the genetics of the wild stocks, pollution, and degraded habitat, certainly play a role. Nevertheless, none compare with the impacts these dams' restricting migration routes and creating 140 miles of warm slack water reservoirs are having on the keystone salmon runs, the iconic Puget Sound Southern Resident Killer Whales, and the hundreds of other species that are dependent upon these salmon runs. As a direct result of the dams, species are declining in one of the greatest ecosystems on earth, while invasive non-native species thrive. As significantly, the dams cause a substantial loss of economic benefits to the nation and region, and inflict significant costs on the American taxpayer.

Recap to Date

Mr. President, we know you are very busy and greatly appreciate your work, but nine months has passed and we have not heard from the White House. However, we have not been idly waiting for a response. We recognize that the letter to you, attached, and set of “one pagers” may not have been enough to necessarily convince your staff, or those federal agency decision makers to quickly understand the depth and soundness of our reasoning. In order to expedite the process, we essentially have done a great deal of the work the US Army Corps of Engineers, DOE’s Bonneville Power Administration, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration should have been doing to update the environmental impact statement under which these dams operate, and in which dam breaching is given as a Reasonable and Prudent Alternative. The attached documents, many prepared by current or retired federal and state public servants, lay out a credible case why the biological, economic, policy rationale and public’s view of these four dams demands that they be breached immediately. I, as one example, am a Civil Engineer who retired after a 35 year career with the Corps of Engineers. I was the Deputy District Engineer for Programs at the Walla Walla District who recommended that the dams be breached in 2000, doing so, after reviewing a 7 year \$33 million study of these four dams and their impacts on salmon and the economy.

Reference Documents

- Executive Order Policy—lays out an approach that does not require Congress to pass legislation to authorize a breach or to appropriate funds to pay for it. The 1980 Northwest Power Act authorizes the breaching action.
- Salmon White Paper (*The Case for Breaching the Four Lower Snake River Dams to Save Wild Snake River Salmon*)—lays out the urgency that cannot wait for the next president to act. NOAA Fisheries officials in the Pacific Northwest have led many decision makers to believe that the salmon runs are at record levels. These so-called “record runs” are derived by shifting the baselines, counting ever smaller salmon and dumping millions upon millions of hatchery fish on top of the few remaining wild ones. The actions come at enormous cost, all of which will dilute the wild salmon genetics in the immediate future, to the extent that there will be little to no resilience remaining in the salmon runs to withstand climate change, ocean acidification, drought and other dire conditions. We will lose the salmon. Hatchery fish are inbred, display little, if any resilience, and experience population crashes, often within just several generations. Climate change is further warming the already deadly reservoirs behind these dams and will further increase their global warming methane emissions. *NOAA has delayed nearly 15 years in breaching the dams, even though NOAA’s research showed that breaching, by itself, likely would recover the lower Snake River Chinook salmon and steelhead runs.* In the interim, wild stocks have continued to decline both in number and in wild genetics. ***This is likely the last call for wild salmon.*** When they go, so will the orcas and the rest. If breaching the first dam, Lower Granite, in November of this year does not happen now, the ecosystem may have great difficulty recovering later.

- Orca Science Paper—points out current lack of food that only gets worse, in spite of what should be good news with the birth of eight surviving calves over the last 15 months. These **new calves, should they all survive, will add demand for 30-40,000 salmon** that can only come from the tribal, commercial and sport fishermen's harvest.
- Economic Reports/Analyses—prepared by Earth Economics, a not for profit economics consulting firm highly regarded in the Pacific Northwest, provide corrections to the Corps Walla Walla District's 2002 economic analysis that was used to justify continued operations and improvements to the dams. The corrected information shows that there was no economic justification then or now to continue with these dams, and that the benefits provided to the nation are only 15 cents for every dollar invested by the taxpayers. This small "benefit" includes the revenue generated from the dams that likely should not be considered, because there is a surplus energy situation in the region. Due to the surplus, when the four dams are generating power, often wind turbines built by the private sector, often through the renewable energy programs you fought so hard to enact, are idled. **This alone is enough waste and embarrassment for the Corps and BPA to quickly remedy the situation through breaching, yet they are not likely to do so without your direction.** Earth Economics reports also point out that the regional economy of the area is being deprived of 3-4000 jobs by keeping these dams. Indeed, Federal Appropriations and BPA ratepayer funds paid to employees working on these four dams provide one of the few measurable benefits to the region. Given federal budgets limitations, this is not a valid enough reason to continue operations of these dams.
- Two Cost Reports —One for keeping the dams and one for breaching provide corrections and updates to the Corps Walla Walla District's 2002 economic analysis report. The Breach Plan/estimate is also formatted as a Supplemental EIS document. Both show how the Walla Walla District provided incomplete or misleading information to the public, elected officials and the White House staff. **The Corps underestimated the cost of operating, maintaining and repairing the dams by at least \$160 million on an average annual basis, while overestimating the cost to breach the four dams by roughly \$500 million.** The breach report also shows how the breaching thru removing the earthen berms of each dam can be done far simpler than originally planned, thus the ability to start within a few months instead of years.

Despite actual expenditures of \$1,000,000,000 to improve salmon bypass and transport over the last 15 years, wild salmon returns have not improved. Everything has been tried at an enormous cost without benefitting wild stocks. The result is their wild genetics are on the verge of being diluted to the point of no return. **It is far cheaper to save salmon by exercising the breach alternative of the active EIS than to continue with the status quo.** While your Government Accounting Office has ridiculed this type of practice by the Corps in the past, this is an especially grievous example in that it added to the mythology that is still purported by the commander of Walla Walla District that these four dams are "a value to the nation." And considering the consequences of a lost ecosystem, this is inexcusable by any standard.

President Barack Obama

March 3, 2016

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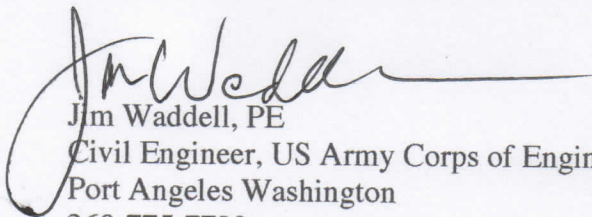
- Summary—describes the efforts of a diverse group of individuals and organizations to test the “will of the people” that shows that **well over 200,000 people have signed petitions, sent emails, written letters** to you and other elected officials principally in the Northwest, in addition to an untold number of calls to the White House, Governor Inslee, Senators Murray and Cantwell and others.

We have provided well over 40 letters conveying this information to elected officials and government agencies, most notably your Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works, Jo-Ellen Darcy. The most recent letters conveyed the biological urgency and the deplorable economics. The letters are yet to be answered. We can understand why. The facts we are presenting are mostly the governments’ own. And while regional offices continue to ignore the facts, the only answer left to the unbiased is that the only Reasonable and Prudent Alternative remaining, breaching, must be accomplished. Nonetheless, this is a difficult decision for any one person to put forward without fear of criticism and censure. Based on the government research, data and reports, however, it becomes abundantly clear that there is no need for more studies, which I am sure you will hear your regional offices in the Northwest heartily recommend. But of course, the dams have been their livelihood for decades, at the expense of the taxpayers, salmon, orcas and the rest of the ecosystem we humans inhabit in the Pacific Northwest. As a matter of comparing government response to an environmental crisis, breaching the four lower Snake River dams is certainly far easier and at virtually no cost, as compared to the restoration of the Florida Everglades.

Mr. President, that is why we are asking you to immediately break this bureaucratic and political logjam of fear, and take executive action to breach the first of the four dams, starting this November. In May 2015 when this request was put forth to you explaining the importance of acting soon, it seemed to us an important legacy opportunity for your administration. Your action is needed urgently to recover the keystone species salmon and the more than 100 species that depend on them, if they are to survive and thrive. The next president likely will not be in a situation that will permit him or her take action on this issue for another 6-8 years. Our work with the public servants who are closest to the facts at hand has shown us that this is now not just a matter of legacy, but of immediate action, or all who service this responsibility will have failed to prevent a tragic loss.


Sharon graced and I will be in the District of Columbia around the 23rd of March and would be glad to meet with members of your staff to brief and discuss this matter in person.

Thank you for your consideration in this important matter.



Jim Waddell, PE
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(signed) 
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President Barack Obama

March 3, 2016

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Enclosures:

1. May 27 2015 Letter to President Obama
2. Executive Order Policy Rational for Breaching
3. Cost Report & Rebuttal for Keeping Dams
(The Cost Report is accessible through the Cost Rebuttal in email transmittals)
4. Breach Plan/Cost Report
5. Salmon White Paper & Appendix
6. Orca White Paper
7. National Economic Development Report
8. Regional Economic Development Report
9. Public Outreach Summary