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CONSERVATION
LEAGUE



Conservation Voters
FOR IDAHO



Sent via email

July 21, 2022

The Honorable Patty Murray
154 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Maria Cantwell
511 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Ron Wyden
221 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jeff Merkley
531 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mike Crapo
239 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable James Risch
483 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jon Tester
311 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Steve Daines
320 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Re: Concerns with the Water Resources Development Act of 2022

Dear Senators:

There is an urgent need for bold action to restore wild Snake and Columbia River salmon and steelhead, help Southern Resident Killer Whales, and to address pressing Tribal justice issues. Much progress has been made in understanding that the removal of the four lower Snake River dams in Washington State must be a central component of any credible recovery plan. And, as we have seen, numerous studies have described how strategic investments in renewable energy, transportation infrastructure, and communities can replace the benefits provided from these dams.

The status quo is not working. The region has spent \$26 billion on efforts to restore salmon. While these investments have kept salmon and steelhead from going extinct, they have not managed to turn the corner and restore these fish. To restore these iconic fish to abundance, we must act now.

We are concerned that language in both the House and Senate versions of the Water Resources Development Act of 2022 (WRDA) will hinder regional progress on this issue.

On the House side, Title V of H.R. 7776 would create a “Columbia Basin Trust” and “Task Force” and allocate three years to create a restoration plan for the Columbia Basin. We are concerned that this lengthy delay and the creation of additional, redundant studies and plans is a diversion and will not move the region closer to a solution that makes all communities whole.

On the Senate side, language has emerged that also directs the US Army Corps of Engineers to conduct a study of Columbia River Basin restoration. However, that language binds the Corps' hands and directs that the "the Secretary shall only formulate measures and alternatives to be consistent with the authorized purposes of existing Federal projects while also maintaining the benefits of such projects." This is, of course, a poison pill as it is a backhanded way of foreclosing studies related to removing the dams (and replacing the dams' services).

Salmon, orcas, and Tribal justice need regional leadership and action now. The House and Senate language do not move this issue forward – rather, this language limits options, creates delay, calls for redundant studies and attempts to keep the region locked in the status quo.

We ask that you oppose the current House and Senate versions of Snake/Columbia River Basin salmon language and work to alter this language in a conference committee. We seek language that puts the region on a pathway to breaching of the lower Snake River dams, and authorizes the Corps to complete necessary studies for that process. The current language does neither.

We are committed to addressing the urgent needs of salmon, orcas, Tribes, and Northwest communities as they pertain to this issue. We look forward to speaking with you about how WRDA provisions can advance the region toward a solution and immediately benefit vulnerable species and communities in the Pacific Northwest.

Sincerely,

Justin Hayes
Executive Director
Idaho Conservation League

Aaron Lieberman
Executive Director
Idaho Outfitters and Guides Association

Nic Nelson
Executive Director
Idaho Rivers United

Shevawn Bell
External Relations Director
Conservation Voters for Idaho

Miles Johnson
Senior Attorney
Columbia Riverkeeper