

For Immediate Release

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Plaintiffs in Columbia-Snake Litigation Applaud the Biden Administration's Resolve to Restore Snake River Salmon

Presidential Memorandum directs federal agencies to restore healthy and abundant salmon populations across the Columbia River Basin

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today the Biden administration issued a [Presidential Memorandum](#) directing federal agencies to use all of their authorities to restore healthy and abundant wild salmon and steelhead populations across the Columbia and Snake River Basin and to review and update any policies not aligned with that goal.

The memo, [as stated by the Administration](#), is part of their “unprecedented commitment” to “honor the United States’ obligations to Tribal Nations and protect and restore America’s natural wonders for future generations.”

Plaintiffs in long-running litigation to protect threatened and endangered salmon in the Columbia River Basin applauded the announcement as a necessary step to ensure all agencies meet the whole of government commitments the Administration has made as the basis for the current stay of that litigation. The Memorandum will require all federal agencies, including the Bonneville Power Administration and others, to make the major changes necessary to restore these iconic and valuable species to a healthy abundance and honor our obligations to Tribal nations.

“We’re heartened by the commitment the Biden Administration is demonstrating in this Memorandum to honor obligations to Tribal Nations and to restore Columbia River salmon to a healthy abundance,” said **Earthjustice Attorney Amanda Goodin**. “Now we need to finish the job. NOAA Fisheries has already concluded that the best and only certain way to recover Snake River salmon to a healthy abundance is to breach the four Lower Snake River dams. We need a comprehensive plan to breach the dams and replace their services – and we need it now, before salmon run out of time.”

“This Memorandum will require some federal agencies, like the Bonneville Power Administration, to make the kind of major changes in policy and direction that are long overdue and critical to saving wild salmon and steelhead,” said **Liz Hamilton, Northwest Sportfishing Industry Association**. “The Memorandum has arrived not a moment too soon. We urgently need major changes in river operations to protect and restore these fish. The future of fishing, along with the economic benefits, hinges on the recovery efforts we put into place today.”

“Even severely depressed as they are today, our commercial coastal salmon fisheries, powered by the Columbia Basin, are still a billion dollar industry supporting tens of thousands of jobs throughout the west coast,” said Glen Spain of the Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen’s Associations (PCFFA), a major fishing industry trade association, and one of the plaintiff groups suing the government to restore Columbia River salmon. “Restoring damaged Columbia Basin salmon runs will be a huge economic benefit to the region – and an investment well worth making.”

“We appreciate the leadership of the Biden Administration in setting a clear direction for all federal agencies to follow,” said **Bill Arthur with the Sierra Club**. “Now we need the agencies to actually deliver bold action to meet the goals of this Memorandum – and we need them to do that with the kind of urgency the crisis facing Snake River salmon and steelhead requires.”

The plaintiffs in the litigation, represented by Earthjustice, have challenged federal agency hydropower systems operations plans in litigation dating back more than 25 years because of their failure to protect threatened and endangered salmon in the Columbia River basin. Three different federal judges have declared five different federal plans illegal. Despite those legal victories, because the dams have still not been removed, nearly every once-abundant salmon run in the Columbia is today listed as either endangered or threatened with extinction under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The litigation is currently paused through Oct. 31 while mediation discussions continue between parties involved in the litigation and the Biden Administration.

The most recent 60-day litigation stay extension, [filed Aug. 31](#) with the U.S. District Court in Oregon, is based on U.S. government commitments “supporting development

of a durable long-term strategy to restore salmon and other native fish populations to healthy and abundant levels, honoring Federal commitments to Tribal Nations, delivering affordable and reliable clean power, and meeting the many resilience needs of stakeholders across the region.”

In the litigation, Earthjustice represents National Wildlife Federation, Sierra Club, National Sportfishing Industry Association, Northwest Energy Coalition, Idaho Conservation League, Idaho Rivers United, Columbia Riverkeeper, the Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen’s Associations, Institute for Fisheries Resources, and Fly Fishers International. The Nez Perce Tribe and state of Oregon are also aligned with these groups. A broad group of supporters and advocates are pushing to [restore the Snake River and save wild salmon](#).