# [***DEFENDERS OF WILDLIFE WELCOMES LOWER SNAKE RIVER STAKEHOLDER PROCESS AS MORE ORCAS ARE PRESUMED DEAD***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:5WX1-S6G1-DYTH-G0SP-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

The following information was ***released by Defenders of Wildlife***:

The state of Washington Wednesday released details regarding a new stakeholder process to discuss the challenges and opportunities associated with removing the four lower Snake River dams. This comes after the Center for Whale Research announced that three more southern resident orcas are presumed dead from starvation, dropping the total population to 73. This stakeholder process about the lower Snake River, which provides the opportunity to share information and opinions on dam removal, is one of 36 recommended actions put forward by Governor Inslee's Orca task Force to help save orcas.

Robb Krehbiel, Northwest representative for ***Defenders of Wildlife***, ***issued*** this statement:

"Defenders of Wildlife is pleased to hear that the lower Snake River stakeholder process is underway. This opens a regional conversation about the future of the lower Snake River and is an important recommendation from the Orca Task Force. Restoring the Snake River is essential to saving orcas, and doing so will require investments to ensure a just transition for communities that would be impacted by dam removal. We are hopeful this process will identify opportunities for the state to move forward in pursuing a healthy river system that works for people and imperiled wildlife."

Background:

Lower Snake River Dam Removal

In March 2018, in response to a series of deaths in the critically endangered southern resident orca population, Governor Jay Inslee created the Southern Resident Orca Recovery Task Force. The Task Force includes more than 40 regional representatives of government agencies, stakeholders, scientists, ***Tribes***, and non-governmental organizations. The removal of the lower Snake River dams was one of 36 recommendations the Orca Task Force submitted to Governor Jay Inslee in 2018. Funding for this process was requested by Gov. Inslee in the state's 2019 operating budget. Forty-two state legislators also sent a letter during the 2018 legislative session expressing their support for this initiative.

This stakeholder process will not make specific recommendations regarding the removal of dams on the lower Snake River, nor will it develop a recommended action plan for the state. The process is intended to be a neutrally-facilitated discussion to collect information and explore options for how services provided by the dams could be replaced with minimal impact to communities in southeast Washington. Stakeholders will have the opportunity to express concerns about potential dam removal and discuss opportunities that would emerge following dam removal. Defenders of Wildlife has been invited to participate as one of the stakeholders in this process.

It was estimated that before the four lower Snake River dams were installed, half of all salmon returning to the Columbia River were bound for the Snake River. Now it's estimated that Snake River salmon make up just 5% of all salmon returning to the Columbia Basin. The Fish Passage Center (a joint research collaborative between state and federal wildlife agencies) estimates that dam removal would result in 1 million more adult chinook salmon returning annually to the mouth of the Columbia River.

Orca Conservation

Southern resident orcas rely heavily on Snake River salmon, which are among the largest salmon on the west coast and return to the mouth of the Columbia River in late winter or early spring, a time when few other salmon are available to the orcas. This is also when orcas are pregnant and in need of additional nutrition. Just 73 southern resident orcas remain today. The population was listed as endangered under the Endangered Species Act in 2005; its population has continued to decline since then.

Defenders of Wildlife is dedicated to the protection of all native animals and plants in their natural communities. With over 1.8 million members and activists, Defenders of Wildlife is a leading advocate for innovative solutions to safeguard our wildlife heritage for generations to come. For more information, visit defenders.org/newsroom and follow us on Twitter @DefendersNews.

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