# [***RESTORING THE MOST ENDANGERED RIVER***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:62GV-4TR1-DYTH-G20G-00000-00&context=1516831)

States News Service

April 13, 2021 Tuesday

Copyright 2021 States News Service

**Length:** 1396 words

**Byline:** States News Service

**Dateline:** WASHINGTON, DC

**Body**

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

Robb Krehbiel

Today, American Rivers announced that the lower Snake River is the most endangered river in the United States. For decades, four large hydropower dams on the river have been disrupting water flow, killing salmon, impacting other endangered wildlife, violating tribal treaties and degrading local economies. The years of destruction are adding up and the river is reaching a tipping point: We must act now if we want to save the Snake River and all who depend on a healthy, free-flowing river.

Fortunately, people throughout the Pacific Northwest have been exploring a new path forward. A proposal by Congressman Simpson in February presents a unique opportunity to finally remove all four dams and create a future that works for all the region's inhabitants from community members to orcas.

Restoring Iconic Salmon Runs

Map of Columbia River Watershed with Snake River highlighted in yellow and Columbia River highlighted in blue.

Before dams were built, an estimated 10 million to16 million salmon spawned in the Columbia Basin, half of which were bound for the Snake River (the Columbia's largest tributary) and the cold, alpine streams and creeks that feed into the Snake River. In 2018, only 665,000 salmon returned to the Columbia Basin.

When the dams were first constructed, no regulations existed to require fish passage. Since then, governments have spent billions of dollars to improve fish passage and increase hatchery production. But Snake River salmon are closer to extinction than they have ever been before, and removing the lower Snake River dams is our best chance to bring abundant, harvestable populations of salmon and steelhead back to the Northwest. Previous dam removals, like those on the Elwha, White Salmon, Rogue and Camel Rivers, prove that restoring a free-flowing river works. These rivers are seeing fish returning and repopulating at rates not seen in decades.

Honor Promises Made to Northwest ***Tribes***

When the U.S. government colonized the Pacific Northwest, ***Tribes*** signed treaties with the federal government that retained their right to fish and harvest resources in exchange for giving vast swaths of land to white settlers.

The four lower Snake River dams directly violate treaties with several ***Tribes***, including the Nez Perce. During dam construction, Native Americans were forcibly removed from fishing villages as the dams created reservoirs that flooded these villages and several traditional fishing spots. Restoring the lower Snake River and its salmon, steelhead and other fish is an essential action the federal government must take to honor treaties and tribal communities.

Save Southern Resident Orcas from Extinction

As salmon across the Northwest vanish, species that rely on them also struggle to survive, including the highly endangered southern resident orcas. For thousands of years, this unique population of orcas migrated from California to British Columbia foraging on abundant wild salmon runs throughout the year. Snake River salmon have always been an important component of the orcas' diet. During winter and early spring, orcas frequent the mouth of the Columbia River as salmon start their journey from the ocean back to the mountain rivers of Idaho and Oregon to spawn.

A young southern resident orca chases a Chinook salmon in the Salish Sea near San Juan Island, Washington, in September 2017. Image obtained under NMFS permit #19091.

Over the last several decades, the southern resident orca population has continued to decline because the orcas' primary foodchinook salmonis disappearing. Removing the lower Snake River dams is one of the most important actions we can take to save these whales from extinction.

Restore World Class Outdoor Recreation Opportunities

Looking at the placid and warm reservoirs of the Snake River today, it's hard to imagine that the river was once one of the wildest in the Lower 48. Over 80 rapids are under these reservoirs, and they once attracted white water rafters from all over the world. People would also enjoy the lush riparian forests along the Snake River, which supported birds and other wildlife. With growing interest in the U.S. for river recreation and wildlife viewing, restoring the lower Snake River can provide outdoor recreation opportunities and bring in tourism dollars to support local communities along the river corridor.

Combat Climate Change

A warming and changing climate is one of the biggest challenges we face today, and warming waters on the Snake River are pushing salmon even closer to extinction. As we fight climate change, we have to ensure our ecosystems are resilient and adaptable. Scientists predict that by removing the four lower Snake River dams, the water on the Snake and Columbia rivers would stay cool enough for salmon to safely migrate.

While dam removal is essential to the region's climate change adaptation, investments in new forms of carbon-free energy will also be required. Hydropower has long powered the Pacific Northwest, but these old dams and turbines are no longer providing the cheapest or most reliable energy for consumers. Through smart investments, we can expand solar and wind energy, increase battery storage and improve energy efficiency to not only replace the power from the dams but also make the grid more resilient, reliable and affordable.

Expand Agriculture and Transportation Infrastructure

Removal of the lower Snake River dams will remove one way that wheat growers and other agricultural producers transport their products to market. While barging on the river has been important to the region, barge traffic has steadily declined over the years, and many farmers are moving more of their goods via train. Dam removal is an opportunity to make smarter investments in rail, port and other transportation infrastructure to ensure farmers can continue to affordably move their goods to market.

Other farmers use the river to irrigate their crops. While water levels will drop following dam removal, farmers should still be able to irrigate their crops with upgrades to irrigation systems since the lower Snake dams were not designed to hold back extra water.

Create Jobs and Bolster Local Economies

By restoring the river and making smart infrastructure investments, the Pacific Northwest can grow and support local economies from the coast to the Rocky Mountains. Expanded recreation, tourism, clean energy and transportation industries can create thousands of family-wage jobs for people living along the Snake River. A free-flowing river also offers opportunities to invest in renewed waterfronts in Lewiston and Clarkston.

These rural communities have been struggling for years because of declining salmon runs and are in desperate need of support. As salmon runs rebound, fishing businesses and communities will also benefit. Recreational anglers and outfitters will see more opportunities to fish for salmon and steelhead in the Snake River and its tributaries. Coastal and Alaskan salmon fisheries would also benefit from more Snake River salmon, which spend most of their lives in the north Pacific Ocean.

Act Now to Save the Snake River

A family group of Southern Resident killer whales chasing a salmon. Image taken from an unmanned hexacopter at >100ft during a research collaboration between NOAA/SWFSC, SR3 and the Coastal Ocean Research Institute. Research authorized by NMFS permit #19091.

Time is running out to save the Snake River. Salmon and orcas are on the brink of extinction, ***Tribes*** are struggling to harvest enough salmon to eat and local economies are suffering. As Congress works to advance investments in our nation's infrastructure, it must also advance projects that remove the outdated four lower Snake River dams and restore the river, the communities that rely on its water, and protect the species that inhabit the Snake.

Together, we can build a better Northwest that works for everyone, but Congress needs to hear from you to act! Contact your members of Congress today and tell them to save the lower Snake River before it's too late.

Author(s)

Robb Krehbiel

Northwest Representative

Robb Krehbiel is the Northwest Representative for Defenders of Wildlife in Seattle where he works to conserve imperiled species across the region, including grizzly bears and orcas, and their habitat through landscape-level planning.

**Classification**

**Language:** ENGLISH

**Publication-Type:** Newswire

**Subject:** RIVERS (96%); ENDANGERED SPECIES (90%); FISHES (90%); WILDLIFE (90%); WILDLIFE CONSERVATION (90%); GOVERNMENT & PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION (89%); MARINE MAMMALS (89%); US FEDERAL GOVERNMENT (89%); AQUIFERS & WATERSHEDS (78%); HYDROELECTRIC POWER GENERATION (78%); NATIVE AMERICANS (78%); INDIGENOUS PEOPLES (77%); INDIGENOUS PEOPLES LAW (77%); LEGISLATIVE BODIES (74%); ECONOMY & ECONOMIC INDICATORS (57%)

**Organization:** DEFENDERS OF WILDLIFE (84%)

**Industry:** DAMS & RESERVOIRS (90%); ENERGY & UTILITIES (90%); HYDROELECTRIC POWER (78%); HYDROELECTRIC POWER GENERATION (78%); DAM & HYDROELECTRIC CONSTRUCTION (77%); CONSTRUCTION (50%)

**Geographic:** NORTHWEST USA (92%); CALIFORNIA, USA (79%); DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, USA (79%); UNITED STATES (94%)

**Load-Date:** April 21, 2021

**End of Document**