DEDICATED PEOPLE
WHO CARE
ABOUT FARM FAMILIES
ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENT
ABOUT THE COMMUNITIES WE SERVE

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May 11, 2022

The Honorable Patty Murray
United States Senate
154 Russel Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jay Inslee
Governor, State of Washington
PO Box 40002
Olympia, WA 98504

Dear Senator Murray and Governor Inslee:

As farm families and those who serve them, we have appreciated your willingness, Senator Murray, to listen and take to heart our concerns over the years. To cite but one example of the long-term links, fifteen years ago we wrote you after your listening session in Colfax expressing appreciation for *"your hard work on behalf of farm families, Northwest agriculture, and our rural towns and economy."* There's been a lot of water under the bridge since then, but we've always appreciated the relationship. We recall, Governor Inslee, past state transportation packages where we've worked together toward your goal of uniting Washingtonians on the issues. Today's challenge—measuring the feasibility of replacing benefits provided by the lower Snake River dams alas falls short of that mark. The further one is from areas where people make a living on the land and depend on its rivers, often the more strident and outspoken the advocacy for what may seem at a distance a simple issue.

We believe that, working together, we can have healthy rivers and a healthy economy.

The issue you've committed to studying is complex and the consequences potentially dire for our farms, our communities, and our ability to provide bountiful crops to feed a hungry nation and the world. Periodic cycles from warmer ocean to colder and back again have had major short-term impacts on salmon populations. Seven years ago, in a cooler cycle, we could celebrate records for salmon returning past Lower Granite— *"fall Chinook records have become almost commonplace,"* wrote a reporter with four records in five years and NOAA Fisheries reporting the most productive decade of fish runs since recordkeeping began at Bonneville Dam in 1938. *"The success of this fall Chinook run reflects the region's commitment and the collaborative spirit that has made it possible,"* said Paul Lumley, Executive Director of the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission.

Though a warm ocean cycle, a huge 'blob' of very warm water off the coast and other challenges have occurred, fish numbers have been making a modest rebound as we've started to benefit from a cooler cycle once more. More can, and will, be done to improve fish populations if we build upon the years of work done by scientists, engineers, tribal hatchery and habitat efforts, keeping, as you have insisted, Senator Murray, sound science a touchstone.

Your Ross Strategic Consulting team lacks the time, and the direction, to study the merits of information they gather.

Inclusion of the ECONorthwest's 'study', for example, suggesting that farmers in the irrigated Columbia Basin could just turn off the sprinklers and grow dryland wheat like the Palouse or that displaced growers could find jobs tearing out dams rankles—reflecting a lack of knowledge of where rain falls and where it seldom does and insensitivity, too. Representative Simpson's rough numbers of what it could cost to abandon dams across the state line in exchange for a 35-year moratorium on legal actions against others, including the fish-ladderless ones in his home state. Like his claims that Washington dams are "stealing" Idaho water it may be a heartfelt polemic but hardly a firm economic analysis. We were concerned, in a recent listening session, to hear from consultant Jim Kramer that his firm had been assured railroads could handle several million metric tons of grain and other products that currently move by barge on the Snake River.

The Class I railroads can't handle the load they have today, much less anything more

Timely deliveries by rail have long been a challenge—it was a topic we discussed together way back in 2007 when you met with us in Colfax, Senator Murray. Ninety percent of the wheat we grow is headed for export—much to key allies across the Pacific and to new potential customers, too. Grain needs to arrive on time to Portland, Longview and other ports so oceangoing ships can reach millers before their feedstocks run dry. Liquid fertilizers move upstream, and they must arrive on time, too—delays of even a few days at seeding time on the 1.5 million acres of farmland served can cost yield potential for the next crop. Every kernel counts.

Meanwhile, back at the ranch…With grain and fertilizer supplies tight, the Union Pacific—often cited by breaching proponents as the Class I rail link for the shortline that follows the river—recently announced to its customers that they were taking some of their owned rail cars out of service and *"are now asking for your help to further reduce the number of active cars on our network…If we do not see reductions to the operating inventory…then we will begin metering traffic"*. A major fertilizer manufacturer was told to reduce shipments some 20% — *"non-compliance will result in the embargo of its facilities by the railroad."* Shippers, growers, the Transportation Trades Department of the AFL-CIO, and thirty-three agricultural organizations have all complained. The chair of the Surface Transportation Board (STB) describes the problem as many years in the making, major rail lines one after another opting for "trimming their workforce" by 45,000 people in an ill-advised efficiency campaign. Agriculture Secretary Vilsack called for "urgent action."

Farmers around the nation are already paying a steep price

At an emergency STB meeting last month Deputy Agriculture Secretary Dr. Jewel Bronaugh put it bluntly: *"Agricultural shippers should not have to pay the price for increasingly unreliable railway service that is pushing American farmers and ranchers to the breaking point… Fertilizer and ag commodities are not the commodities to de-prioritize...Ag shippers are paying thousands of dollars extra per car just to get service, easily representing a 50-100% increase in costs. Because ag shippers operate on thin margins in hyper-competitive global markets, efficient and reliable rail service is essential. When railroads charge unreasonable rates and provide poor service, farmers struggle to make ends meet, consumers pay higher prices at the grocery store and the United States becomes less competitive on the global market."*

The Class I rail companies aren't much interested in short hauls of Northwest wheat to Pasco, as has been suggested, or to ocean ports.

The Washington Grain Train Strategic Plan notes that *"BNSF Railway and the Union Pacific Railroad receive higher revenues from longer grain hauls originating in the Midwest versus the shorter eastern Washington grain shipments. Class I railroads have little incentive to buy extra cars to service Washington state grain growers."* As Philip Beach, author of Wheat Country Railroad, writes, *"with so much more potential income from long hauls, the Class I railroads aren't much interested in eastern Washington hauls except for large 110-unit car trains."* That wouldn't work for elevators along the Snake River where a narrow, deep canyon would prevent installations of large circle tracks to handle mile-and-a-half long trains. More than 600 miles of eastern Washington rail have been removed over the years—replacing even a portion of them would cost more than $1 million per mile, replacing empty, antiquated 'crib' elevators, some on the verge of collapse, with modern terminals, $30 million each, $50 million for sidings, plus the huge cost to buy or condemn former rail right-of-way from new owners who have built homes or shops on that land.

We need rail and trucks, too, the latter for short hauls, but our dependence upon barge service for **timely shipments** of crops downriver, and crop nutrients upriver, cannot be resolved at any price.

We could lose momentum in protecting air quality by being forced to depend solely upon trains and trucks.

As agriculture, we are proud to be reducing greenhouse gases and saving carbon. A four year, voluntary, incentive-based program in the Palouse River drainage, for instance, the Washington Conservation Commission reports, helped improve fish habitat and saved enough soil to fill dirt laden dump trucks lined up, one after another, from the Capitol building in Olympia to the Space Needle. Farmers can not only reduce carbon emissions, but they can also sequester it in the soil. We've reduced soil erosion 85%, dust six-fold, and stubble burning 22-fold—the biggest gains in productivity and stewardship since crops were first sown. Barges have helped us be efficient as stewards – shipping to the largest US export grain terminal, third largest in the world – near where the Columbia River meets the Pacific. According to the EPA Emissions Lab, tugs and barges produce 80-85% less hydrocarbons than trains or trucks, 69% less carbon monoxide than trains, nearly 90% less than trucks. Tugs and barges produce 71% less nitrous oxide than trains, nearly 95% less than trucks.

Moving to a "slo-mo" transport system is unwise as world population, and the number of hungry people, rises…

Timely deliveries of the bountiful crops farm families raise are essential to serve overseas millers, for whom delivery on time is essential, and needy people around the globe in what the UN World Food Programme warns is shaping up as *"a year of catastrophic hunger."* Warnings of a *"trucker shortage [that] snarls ag and food products as feds search for solutions,"* a situation caused by rail service issues, forcing the grain industry to lean *"even more heavily on trucking"* are daunting, too. Hopefully some of these challenges will be ameliorated in the years ahead but with a burgeoning world population to feed, we'll have to do our part to increase production substantially — 50 to 100% — in the next generation to meet growing world demand. The

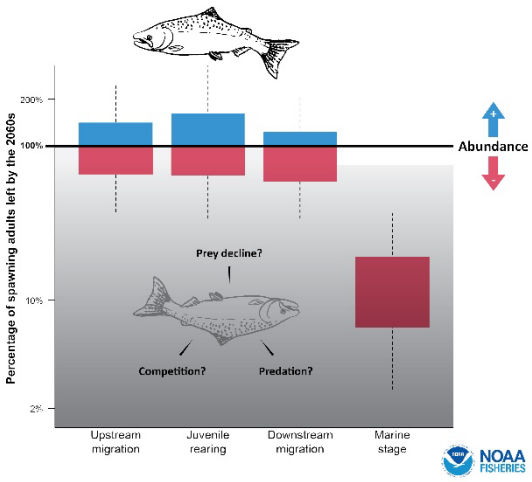
pressure on timely transportation will not ease, even with the four lower Snake River dams in place, let alone with some makeshift alternative.

As Deputy Secretary Bronaugh mentioned, we're worried that farmers would be pushed to the breaking point with volatile and hyper-competitive world markets, rising input costs, balky and expensive transport, and the potential loss of lower-cost energy efficient renewable hydropower. Solar and wind on their own could hardly meet the challenge without hydro backup and they're struggling, too. Recently we read of solar firms taking big losses. *"What I'm seeing is a colossal market failure,"* says Ben Blackwell, CEO of the trade group Global Wind Energy Council, with Western turbine manufacturers retrenching and Chinese competitors trying to fill the gap. It's been estimated that 1,100 farmers could be forced out of business by dam breaching and its consequences, a loss Washingtonians and the nation can ill afford. For farm families, land is not just a commodity measured in acres, it is soil they nurture and care for year after year, learning what works and what does not, working with scientists from our land grant schools and local agronomists, memories and a heritage year after year, generation after generation. Their numbers have fallen in tough times over the years and we need them for the long haul. Uncertainty and instability make a difficult profession that much more so.

As a stunning NOAA Fisheries illustration shows, a warming ocean is the biggest of many challenges.

Scientists at the NOAA Northwest Fisheries Science Center point to the greatest risk to our iconic salmon—rising surface sea temperature brought on by record amounts of greenhouse gases potentially leading to staggering declines—up to 90%—of salmon returning from the ocean. And the warmer temperatures impacted fish upstream from dams, too, as during the 'heat dome' a year ago where temperatures spiked with low flows on the Salmon River and on the Snake upstream from Lower Granite – 72° and warmer waters week after week, highly dangerous to salmon.

PROJECTED CHANGE IN CHINOOK SALMON SURVIVAL AS OCEANS WARM



Habitat offers hope.

With survival through the hydro system already high and little evidence that dam removal would be the solution, lead author of the NOAA center study of ocean temperatures, Lisa Crozier looks for *"actions like improving coastal habitat, reducing species that prey upon or compete with Chinook, slowing climate change and holistic research addressing all stages of the fish, from mountain stream to ocean."* Habitat offers hope, the scientists conclude.

Fish ladders, a much less draconian step than breaching, could help. It's encouraging to see funding to complete fish passage at the Howard Hanson dam on the upper Green River, doubling the spawning habitat there for salmon. Similar steps forward with the Seattle City Light trio of dams on the Skagit and in Idaho, where more than 60% of former Snake River habitat has been blocked, would help, too. Much more can, and must, be done and we salute you, Senator Murray and your colleagues for helping make it happen.

A 'giant step' for salmon

We're encouraged by the substantial investments provided in the infrastructure package for salmon recovery—$2.8 billion for hatcheries, habitat restoration, culvert replacement, filling a backlog of 157 unfunded salmon projects east of the Cascades alone and, above all, for more salmon research. A giant step for salmon, indeed.

Peter Kareiva, former director of Conservation Biology at NOAA's Fisheries Science Center has expressed concern that making dam breaching a black or white choice *"makes it harder to negotiate and sustain solutions that must satisfy diverse stakeholders with diverse values. It need not be a choice between fish and hydropower…Solutions, not symbols, are what we need."*

It is time for all of us to work together and look for holistic solutions.

We hope you'll work to keep the focus upon sound science, and sound analysis of the risks of breaching dams, not mere compiling of source materials and opinions. While those have their place, the potential impacts of the stark draconian action contemplated here are staggering and merit closer study and more time to ensure it is done well. Were it not only what appears to be very wasteful in transportation – 860,000 tons of carbon and 5 million gallons more of diesel to consume each year – it would be troubling. But breaching fails to address surface sea temperatures— *"even if survival in the rivers was 100%, [salmon] are not going to recover if we don't do something about the ocean,"* as NOAA Fisheries puts it. Breaching would harm people, jobs and communities and hamper our ability to provide foodstuffs to feed a hungry nation and those in needy countries around the world. Your achievement in Congress is just one step, but an important one at that, for all to work together and learn more. As Senator Cantwell stated: *"One thing is clear. We need a lot more science. Why are salmon dying at sea? We don't have any science on that, so how are we supposed to make these decisions?"*

We agree with fisheries ecologist Lisa Crozier that *"the goal is for people to come together and look for holistic solutions…We have to get serious,"* as she aptly puts it. It is past time to move beyond a potentially devastating and divisive action. If we put our hearts into it as Washingtonians, we can make real progress through science, hard work, and a shared goal to help our iconic Northwest fish while keeping our economy strong, too. Working together we can build upon a shared commitment and collaborative spirit, as Paul Lumley of the Inter-Tribal Fish Commission hoped for several years ago. As I noted at the outset, we can have healthy rivers and a healthy economy. We should accept nothing less.

Sincerely,

Alex McGregor, Chairman

cc: Jim Kramer, Kramer Consulting
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