

*1000 Friends of Oregon • American Rivers • American Whitewater • Association of Northwest Steelheaders
Bird Alliance of Oregon • Boulder-White Clouds Council • Center for Biological Diversity
Center for Environmental Law & Policy • Coastal Trollers Association • Consolidated Oregon Indivisible Network
Columbia Riverkeeper • Deschutes River Alliance • Earth Ministry/Washington Interfaith Power & Light
Earthjustice • Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon and Oregon Interfaith Power & Light
Endangered Species Coalition • Environment Oregon • Environment Washington • Faith Action Network
Federation of Western Outdoor Clubs • Friends of the Columbia Gorge • Greater Hells Canyon Council
Idaho Conservation League • Idaho Rivers United • Intercommunity Peace & Justice Center
JUJustice Washington • League of Women Voters of Idaho • League of Women Voters of Montana
League of Women Voters of Oregon • League of Women Voters of Washington • Native Fish Society
Neighbors for Clean Air • Nimiipuu Protecting the Environment • Northwest Guides and Anglers Association
Northwest Sportfishing Industry Association • NW Energy Coalition • Orca Conservancy • Orca Network
Oregon League of Conservation Voters • Oregon Shores Conservation Coalition • Oregon Wild
Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations • Polly Dyer Seattle Broads Great Old Broads for Wilderness
Save Our wild Salmon Coalition • Sierra Club • Snake River Waterkeeper • Snohomish County Indivisible
Spokane Riverkeeper • Washington Conservation Action • Washington Wild • Washington Wildlife Federation
WaterWatch of Oregon • Wetlands Conservancy • Wild Orca • Wild Steelhead Coalition • Willamette Riverkeeper*

Secretary Antony Blinken
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20522

September 16, 2024

Senator Patty Murray
154 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Senator Maria Cantwell
511 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Senator Jeff Merkley
531 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Senator Ron Wyden
211 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

RE: Actions Needed to Strengthen Columbia River Treaty Agreement-In-Principle

Dear Secretary Blinken and Senators Murray, Cantwell, Merkley and Wyden,

On behalf of 57 national and Northwest-based conservation, clean energy, faith, fishing, and civic groups and our millions of members, we write to share our perspective on the Agreement-in-Principle (AIP) announced recently between the United States and Canada on the modernization of the 60-year-old Columbia River Treaty and to offer our recommendations for strengthening cooperative management of the Columbia River.

First, we are very disappointed that the AIP excludes the addition of *Ecosystem Function* as a third primary purpose of the modernized Treaty, as was called for in the *2013 Regional Recommendation* and by Columbia Basin tribes and many stakeholders. Without formal recognition of *Ecosystem Function* as a new primary purpose, the health of the river and its fish populations will continue to remain a secondary issue in Treaty implementation. This concern is

heightened because the flow augmentation component of the AIP will not meet the needs of Columbia River salmon.

We ask that you act now to build upon the AIP and consider the following recommendations, which can be pursued either unilaterally by the U.S. or bilaterally in negotiation with Canada, to ensure the final modernized Treaty meaningfully improves the health of the Columbia River ecosystem and its struggling fish populations.

1. Secure additional water for fish via a new Non-Treaty Storage Agreement (NTSA). The NTSA manages the extra 5 million-acre-feet (MAF) of water storage built into the Mica Dam above Columbia River Treaty requirements. Under the current NTSA, which expires on September 15, 2024, the U.S. previously accessed non-Treaty water stored behind Mica Dam to support downstream fishery needs. In combination with the 1-1.5 MAF of Treaty water included in the AIP for salmon, a new fish-focused NTSA could achieve the minimum 3-5 MAF of water that Tribal and other fisheries scientists have identified as necessary for threatened populations.

2. Secure Congressional appropriations and authorization for the Flood Risk Policy Review called for in the Regional Recommendation. The 2013 Regional Recommendation called for a study of options for managing flood risk while identifying opportunities to provide fish flows and improve habitat. This could include changes to existing flood control rule curves, the use of artificial intelligence to improve drought/flood forecasting, and “green” infrastructure projects that can abate flood waters and reduce our reliance on Canada while also improving fish and wildlife habitat. It could also identify weaknesses in existing traditional flood infrastructure. Given that traditional flood control capacity seems poised to *decrease* under the AIP, now is the time to proceed with this long-delayed assessment.

3. Add language to the modernized Treaty strengthening the role of the Joint Ecosystem and Indigenous and Tribal Cultural Values Body (JEB). The AIP includes the creation of the JEB to inform how Treaty operations can better support ecosystem needs and Tribal and Indigenous cultural values. Unfortunately, the AIP does not reflect language *requiring* the bodies that currently govern the Treaty (U.S. Entity, Canadian Entity, Permanent Engineering Board, and committees) to consider and, whenever feasible, implement the JEB’s recommendations. It is essential that the JEB’s input on Treaty implementation be prescriptive rather than merely advisory to fulfill U.S. commitments on Indigenous inclusion and ecosystem health.

4. Provide expert representation for ecosystems by adding new members to the Treaty’s governing bodies. The current membership of the Treaty’s governing bodies (U.S. Entity, Canadian Entity, Permanent Engineering Board, and committees) is unable to serve as an effective “voice for the river.” President Biden should amend Section 101 of Executive Order 11177 to appoint, for example, the Environmental Protection Agency and/or NOAA Fisheries to serve on the U.S. Entity alongside Bonneville Power Administration and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Similarly, the U.S. should work with Canada to update Article XV of the current Treaty to add members with ecosystem expertise to the Permanent Engineering Board and supporting committees.

5. Add formal public engagement mechanisms to the modernized Treaty. Many international watershed governance systems, both in North America and around the world, include tools to support ongoing public education and input. Incorporating public engagement into the Columbia River Treaty will enhance, not hinder, its long-term success.

The current window of opportunity to build upon the AIP to craft a stronger, more balanced Columbia River Treaty may be very short. Fully modernizing the Treaty to reflect current knowledge, societal values, and the pressing challenges we face is of critical importance to all people of the Columbia Basin and Pacific Northwest. We appreciate your attention at this pivotal time. Should you have any questions or if we can assist in any way, please contact *Save Our Wild Salmon Coalition* executive director Joseph Bogaard at joseph@wildsalmon.org / 206-300-1003.

Sincerely,

Joseph Bogaard, Executive Director
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Sierra Club

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Rev. AC Churchill, Executive Director
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