

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Food Professionals' send letter to Gov. Inslee and Sens. Murray and Cantwell supporting the need for a comprehensive solution for imperiled salmon in the Columbia-Snake River Basin

SEATTLE – In recognition of the extinction crisis facing many Northwest salmon populations today, more than 229 food professionals - chefs, brewers, market owners, farmers, fishermen and others from across Washington State – sent a letter today to Gov. Jay Inslee, Sen. Patty Murray, and Sen. Maria Cantwell. The signers of the letter recognize that for them, “salmon is much more than a fish; it is one of our most valued business partners.” The letter thanks these policymakers for their past efforts to protect salmon and asks for their “continued leadership at this moment of great urgency and opportunity.”

The letter stresses that urgent work is needed in 2022 to prevent further extinction and to restore salmon abundance in the Snake River Basin in a manner that brings everyone – including farmers, fishermen and other food producers - forward together.

For decades, fishing and farming communities have needlessly been at odds while salmon populations have edged ever closer to extinction. Chef Renee Erickson, chef and co-owner of Seattle’s *Sea Creature Restaurants*: “Chefs need foods produced by both farmers and fishers to create meals for our customers. I want to source foods as close to home as I can for my restaurants – so we need policies that will provide fishermen and farmers alike greater certainty and the opportunity to thrive.”

People in the restaurant industry need to be creative to stay in business. Chef Kristi Brown opened *Communion* in Seattle with Damon Bomad during the pandemic. “If we learned anything in the last two years it’s how to survive. What had worked pre-COVID was not going to keep the doors open. We had to come up with new strategies. Our elected officials need to take this kind of approach to restore salmon abundance in the Snake River Basin and across our region.”

Decades of trial and error have demonstrated that well-managed fisheries by themselves are not enough to assure sufficient numbers of salmon to drive the economic engine, jobs, and businesses they support. Protecting, restoring, and reconnecting healthy and resilient habitat is essential to salmon survival and recovery – and the tribal cultures, fishing communities and businesses that rely upon them.

Chef Robin Leventhal says she is someone who ‘has a foot on both sides of the state.’ Robin grew up in along the banks the Salmon River in Idaho. “When I was a kid in the ‘70’s I remember how the surface

shimmered red when the sockeye came home to spawn. I also sadly remember the story of Lonesome Larry, the only sockeye that made it home to the Salmon River's headwaters. This was in 1992 and my heart broke when I heard the news." After 30 years as a chef in Seattle, she became an instructor at the *Wine Country Culinary Institute* in Walla Walla. "I'm passionate about restoring salmon abundance. This isn't a debate about borders, or what side of the state you are on. It's about prioritizing healthy salmon *and* healthy communities!"

The letter closes with a call to action: "We need new policies and programs in 2022 that will provide both fisherman and farmer greater certainty and the opportunity to thrive. We ask you to seize the window of opportunity before us to develop and deliver a comprehensive investment package that restores the lower Snake River, recovers healthy salmon populations, and keeps farmers and fishermen gainfully employed and feeding our communities."

BACKGROUND: Last year, Senator Murray and Governor Inslee acknowledged the extinction crisis facing Snake River fish and committed to developing a long-term plan by July 31, 2022 to protect and restore these imperiled populations. As a key step in the process to develop a comprehensive solution for Snake River salmon and Northwest communities, they have been working closely with the region's tribes, stakeholders, and other experts to produce a report this spring that identifies how to replace the energy, irrigation and transportation services currently provided by the dams.

While Sen. Murray and Gov. Inslee have not committed to a dam removal plan, they have put this option at the center of discussions today. Their report will be a crucial resource for understanding our region's options for replacing the dams' services as they explore how to restore salmon abundance, help feed endangered orcas, and uphold our nation's promise to our region's tribes in a manner that moves everyone forward together.

Confidential settlement talks between the Nez Perce Tribe, State of Oregon, conservation/fishing plaintiffs and the Biden Administration are also under way on a similar timeline. The decades-long litigation has been paused temporarily to allow the parties to work together to develop a long-term solution to resolve the lawsuit and protect endangered wild salmon and steelhead from the risk of extinction caused by the system of federal dams and reservoirs on the Snake and Columbia rivers.

Last year, Senator Cantwell led efforts to secure \$2.8 billion for salmon recovery and habitat restoration efforts for Washington State and the Pacific Northwest states in the bipartisan infrastructure bill. While this is a crucial step towards salmon recovery, we must follow the leadership of Northwest tribes, and fishing, farming, and food professionals - as well as decades of proven science, to determine what we do next. Removing the four federal dams on the lower Snake River is the biggest and best step we can take to restore Northwest salmon and steelhead to abundance.

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