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Northwest **Power and** **Conservation Council**

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July 13, 2021

The Honorable Mike Crapo
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Crapo:

The Columbia River and its tributaries stretch into seven states and British Columbia and are home to salmon and steelhead that have been a key part of the Northwest's culture and economy for centuries. Beginning with Native American tribes and continuing into the modern day, tribal, commercial, and recreational fisheries rely on these salmon and steelhead for food, cultural, and economic benefits.

Prior to development of the Columbia River Basin, it is estimated that 10 to 16 million salmon and steelhead returned annually to the Basin to spawn and contribute to the next generation of these iconic fish. Habitat degradation and intense commercial harvest led to a precipitous decline in adult salmon and steelhead returns beginning in the late 1800s, followed by significant declines attributable to the construction and operation of hydropower dams beginning in the 1930s along with continued habitat degradation. In recent years, only between one and two million salmon and steelhead return to the Basin annually.

Beginning in 1938 and continuing through 1980, several different federal statutes authorized and funded the construction and operation of hatchery facilities and programs that mitigate for hydropower and habitat impacts on naturally produced salmon and steelhead. These programs, which produce millions of salmon and steelhead annually, support both marine and freshwater fisheries and have been instrumental in both preventing extinction and supporting the recovery and conservation of fish populations listed under the Endangered Species Act. Further, the programs are vital for the fruitful exercise of treaty reserved rights of the four lower river treaty tribes – as well as non-Indian recreational and commercial fisheries both within the Columbia River and along the West Coast. Columbia River Hatchery programs also play a critical

role economically by contributing to U.S. Fisheries in Alaska, Washington, and Oregon that provide 26,700 full time equivalent jobs and \$3.4 billion in economic value annually.

Like the hydropower dams and irrigation projects associated with them, these aging federal hatchery facilities need adequate funding to maintain infrastructure and continue operations. For several decades, agency budgets and congressional appropriations have not provided sufficient funds to maintain and repair critical infrastructure such as pipelines, generators, pumps, filters, chillers, and rearing units that are in danger of failing – or in some cases have already failed – putting both fish and the fisheries they support at risk. Emergency situations cannot be addressed in real-time, and critical capital projects cannot be pursued. In the face of these challenges, federal, state, and tribal partners have compiled the enclosed list of unfunded capital and deferred maintenance needs throughout the basin. The total cost to address these needs is estimated at \$1 billion, including substantial engineering and design work still needed by many of the larger projects.

The [hatchery facilities and programs](#) and the [Asset Management Strategic Plan](#) within the Northwest Power and Conservation Council's [Columbia River Basin Fish and Wildlife Program](#) are critical components and are explicitly related to the basin's regional efforts to mitigate impacts to fish due to dams and development. A coordinated regional approach to adequately fund all hatchery operations and maintain and modernize hatchery infrastructure to meet their intended goals is critical to meeting federal mitigation obligations in the entire Columbia River Basin. We appreciate your consideration of this issue and the implications that continued significant funding shortfalls will have for the region.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. We respectfully request that Congress provide funding to address the backlog of hatchery infrastructure needs.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Richard Devlin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "R" and "D".

Richard Devlin
Chair