



WA Black Lives Matter Alliance in solidarity with Northwest Tribal Nations calling for the removal of four Lower Snake River dams

Dear Washington Representatives,

We are writing to you as Black leaders who believe Black liberation is inextricably linked to Indigenous self-determination. In solidarity with the Northwest tribes, we're calling on you to take action toward a comprehensive solution to restore salmon that includes the removal of the four lower Snake River dams.

Restoring salmon is a human rights issue.

For centuries, Northwest Tribes have stewarded salmon on the Columbia and Snake Rivers and relied on them to sustain their cultures, economies, and identity. The decline of salmon has been devastating to the Native people of our state. Beyond the ecological or economic devastation, the loss of salmon has violated the treaty and human rights of Native people.

Nakia Williamson, Nez Perce Cultural Resource Program Director, said, "We are losing inherited rights, losing part of a relationship, even part of ourselves. These for us are human rights issues. Without [salmon] we lose everything, identity, language, spirituality, our way of thinking. That is what is at stake."

Restoring salmon back to abundance is not only urgent to prevent the extinction of this iconic species, but morally and legally necessary to protect the rights, health, and cultures of Indigenous people.

This is why we join with Northwest tribes, in calling for the removal of the four lower Snake River dams.

The dams are a manifestation of systemic genocide and have been a form of Indigenous erasure since their inception. Buried beneath the reservoirs created by the dams are ancestral lands, accustomed fishing sites, traditional plant-medicines, and burial grounds. We will not stand by as our Native relatives' rights, health, culture, and identities continue to be threatened and erased.

We believe Indigenous self-determination is inextricable from Black liberation.

Our past and present as Black and Native people in the U.S. are tied to the same colonial project. In the name of "progress" and "clean" energy, the rights, health, and cultures of Native people continue to be desecrated while Black and people of color communities are segregated into neighborhoods with polluted water and land and hotter temperatures fueled by climate change.

Removing the four lower Snake River dams is the first step in correcting the injustices endured by Native people, but the solution cannot stop there. This is why we are calling for a comprehensive solution to restore salmon that includes dam removal and equitable investments for BIPOC communities.

The paradigm-shifting investments that are needed to replace the infrastructure of these dams will not make up for the decades of disinvestment in BIPOC communities, but could be a starting point that powers BIPOC-led economic opportunity, infrastructure solutions, and cultural revitalization.

It is time for you to take action.

In the same way we as Black people have heard from elected leaders that they need more time to act on racial justice, Indigenous people have heard “we need more time” to prevent the salmon extinction.

In his Letter from Birmingham Jail, Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote, “‘Wait’ has almost always meant ‘Never.’”

We join Indigenous people in asking - when will you break the cycle of colonial violence and inaction? The salmon and the Native people of our state will not wait.

The time to act is now.

Sincerely,

Washington Black Lives Matter Alliance Steering Committee

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