



SKAGIT COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

LISA JANICKI, Chair, Third District
RON WESEN, First District
KENNETH A. DAHLSTEDT, Second District

September 28, 2016

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

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

Representative Rick Larsen
2113 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Representative Suzan DelBene
318 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

RE: Misuse of EPA Salmon Habitat Restoration Funds – What’s Upstream Campaign

Greetings,

As you are no doubt aware, \$655,000 in EPA funding designated for salmon habitat restoration was recently diverted by an employee of the Swinomish Indian Tribal Community into the “What’s Upstream” program, a highly misleading public relations and lobbying campaign aimed at arousing undeserved public ire toward Skagit Valley farmers. We write to express our disappointment and concern, and request greater oversight for salmon habitat restoration funding allocated to the Skagit ecosystem.

The Skagit is the only river system in the Puget Sound Basin with all five species of Pacific salmon in harvestable numbers, the result of our community’s strong conservation ethic in cooperation with the four Native American tribes with whom we share this ecosystem. Skagit County has been a leader in salmon habitat restoration with the help of federal funding, already completing the majority of priority fish passage projects identified within Skagit County. Federal habitat restoration funding to accomplish this work is increasingly scarce in a tight economy, and we find the diversion of funds troubling.

It is also important to recognize that Skagit Valley agriculture is the center of our community, generating over \$500 million each year. Preservation of our agricultural land base has been the focus of our Comprehensive Plan since its initial adoption, which requires a stable and viable local agricultural economy. For decades our community has worked extremely hard to successfully protect Skagit Valley farmland – some of the world’s richest – from the sprawl that has consumed the agricultural land base in the counties to our south. In a warming and drying climate, protecting our farmland and agricultural economy is a matter of food security, an imperative that federal salmon habitat restoration dollars should not be allowed to actively undermine.

SKAGIT COUNTY COMMISSIONERS ADMINISTRATIVE BUILDING

1800 CONTINENTAL PLACE, SUITE 100, MOUNT VERNON, WA 98273 PHONE (360) 416-1300 FAX (360)336-9307

Finally, we note that the improper use of federal funds has unnecessarily promoted conflict between Indian and non-Indian communities in the Skagit Valley, undermining the historically challenging goal of bringing our constituents together around our many shared values and forward-looking objectives. We are deeply saddened to see this occur.

It is not only possible for agriculture and ecosystem restoration to coexist, but they must necessarily work together cooperatively. Rather than falsely vilifying farmers, we believe that we should actively enlist farmers in ecosystem restoration, focusing our community's abundant positive energy and limited financial resources on initiatives that meet both human and ecosystem needs. We are certain that you share our point of view, and trust that future federal salmon habitat restoration funding in the Skagit Basin will be subject to more effective oversight.

Sincerely,

BOARD OF SKAGIT COUNTY COMMISSIONERS


LISA JANICKI, Chair


RON WESEN, Commissioner


KENNETH DAHLSTEDT, Commissioner

Cc: Brian Cladoosby, Chair, Swinomish Indian Tribal Community
Jennifer Washington, Chair, Upper Skagit Indian Tribe
Tom Wooten, Chair, Samish Indian Tribe
Norma Joseph, Chair, Sauk-Suiattle Indian Tribe
Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland
Western Washington Agricultural Association
Richard Weyrich, Skagit County Prosecuting Attorney
Dan Berentson, Director, Skagit County Public Works