The Honorable Senator Christine Rolfes  
Chair, Senate Ways and Means Committee  
233 John A. Cherberg Building  
Olympia, WA 98604-0423

The Honorable Representative Timm Ormsby  
Chair, House Appropriations Committee  
315 John L. O'Brien Building  
Olympia, WA 98604-0423

Dear Senator Rolfes and Representative Ormsby,

We write to express our strong support for funding the priority actions Governor Inslee included in his budget to address the urgent plight of our critically endangered Southern Resident orcas.

In particular, we support the funds to implement two key actions concerning salmon recovery in the Snake and Columbia Rivers because these two actions could have huge returns for the money invested in them. These actions can provide near-term Chinook salmon increases and support long-term sustainable salmon abundance. The actions include (1) increased "spill" of water at federal dams; and (2) a stakeholder forum to identify and detail the investments for community transitions that will be needed if there is a decision to remove the four lower Snake River dams.

Both of these actions were also recommended by the Orca Recovery Task Force.

Increased “flexible” spill is important because it can provide immediate survival benefits to out-migrating juvenile salmon and so help increase near-term adult salmon numbers available for orcas.

We also strongly support funding for a facilitated forum to address opportunities and mitigation if there is a federal decision to remove the four lower Snake River dams. While we may have differing opinions on the need to remove these dams, Washington communities will be most directly affected, both positively and negatively, by a decision to restore this river and its salmon populations. Therefore, we need to explore, discuss and understand these effects and develop a plan to address them if necessary. This kind of forward-looking effort by stakeholders and community leaders with differing perspectives is our responsibility and would provide an important complement to the NEPA EIS now being developed by federal agencies.

Sincerely,

Washington State Legislators