April 16, 2020

The Honorable Derek Kilmer
1410 Longworth House Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Kilmer:

As residents of the 6th Congressional district, we are writing to express our appreciation of your leadership in Congress and to ask for your urgent help to address a set of linked problems affecting salmon, orca and communities in our district and across the State.

Salmon and orca are perhaps our two most emblematic Northwest species. They have inhabited our coastal waters for hundreds of thousands of years; they are deeply woven into tribal cultures and highly valued by many non-tribal communities as well. Unfortunately, many salmon populations and the Southern Resident orcas that rely upon them are struggling. Without big changes in our policies and actions, we may lose these species forever.

Salmon are an important economic driver in the 6th District. Commercial and recreational fishermen depend on returns of salmon for their livelihoods, as do many in the tourist industry. The dollars from the fishing fleet and tourist trade flow into our coastal communities to support local businesses and families.

The Columbia-Snake River Basin was once the most productive chinook salmon system on Earth. Steep salmon population declines in recent decades and the loss of benefits that they bring has harmed communities in the 6th District and across our region. We now know that the loss of chinook salmon is the main cause of endangerment for Southern Resident orcas. They require an increased supply of prey throughout the year in order to survive and reproduce.

Unfortunately, past Columbia Basin salmon restoration efforts have proven costly and ineffective. It’s clear that a new approach is urgently needed. Support is growing today among regional sovereigns, stakeholders and citizens for developing comprehensive solutions. Working together, we can recover abundant salmon populations and meet the needs of communities on both sides of the Cascades.

We believe that the science strongly supports restoring a free-flowing lower Snake River as the cornerstone of a lawful and effective recovery plan. We also believe that working together, Northwest policymakers, sovereigns and stakeholders can develop a set of investments and actions that not only restore salmon and help feed hungry orcas, but also ensure a reliable and affordable energy system and a strong and prosperous economy in the 6th District and across the Northwest.

Given the urgent challenges facing our salmon, orca and communities, we ask for your leadership to bring people together to collaborate on win-win solutions that recover healthy salmon and orca populations and invest in vibrant fishing and farming communities.

Thank you for considering our concerns and offering your leadership on behalf of the 6th District and the nation.

Sincerely,

Residents of Washington’s 6th Legislative District