



August 24, 2026

The Honorable Harriet Hageman, Chair

Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries
Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Re: H.R. 9621 — Northwest Endangered Salmon Predation Prevention Act

Dear Chair Hageman:

I am writing regarding H.R. 9621, the Northwest Endangered Salmon Predation Prevention Act, which was considered by the Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries on July 21.

I share the concern expressed by members of the Subcommittee regarding the severe condition of many Pacific Northwest salmon populations. Recovering these fish is essential to tribal treaty rights, commercial and recreational fisheries, Southern Resident killer whales and the ecological health of the Northwest.

My concern is whether H.R. 9621 has demonstrated that substantially expanding lethal control of seals and sea lions will actually produce measurable, population-level recovery of wild salmon.

I recently examined this question in an article for *Columbia Insight*, which I am enclosing with this letter. In preparing it, I interviewed Dr. Timothy Ragen, former executive director of the U.S. Marine Mammal Commission, and Casey McLean, executive director of SeaLife Response, Rehabilitation and Research (SR3).

Neither suggested that pinniped predation is irrelevant.

Dr. Ragen has served on federal task forces examining pinniped interactions with salmon at Bonneville Dam and Willamette Falls and has supported removing individual pinnipeds where highly endangered salmon face acute losses. McLean, while generally opposed to

culling, similarly acknowledged that narrowly targeted removals may sometimes be scientifically justified when adequately funded, monitored and used to learn.

The distinction is critical.

The question before Congress is not whether seals and sea lions eat salmon. They do.

The question is whether substantially expanding their killing will result in more wild salmon surviving to reproduce and rebuild self-sustaining populations.

The scientific evidence does not yet provide a simple answer.

The 2022 Washington State Academy of Sciences review cited during congressional testimony concluded that the evidence is consistent with pinniped predation being a contributing factor in depressed salmon populations. But the Academy also explicitly cautioned that the evidence does **not support a definitive conclusion that pinnipeds are a primary cause of failed salmon recovery.**

The report identified significant uncertainties, including whether pinniped predation adds substantially to salmon mortality or partly replaces mortality that would occur anyway; the importance of alternative prey; and indirect food-web effects involving other salmon predators such as Pacific hake.

Most importantly, the Academy called for strategic adaptive management accompanied by intensive monitoring and adequately funded scientific evaluation.

That raises several questions I believe the Subcommittee should answer before H.R. 9621 advances.

How can Congress responsibly authorize lethal take based on a percentage of Potential Biological Removal when H.R. 9621 provides no sustained funding to monitor pinniped populations and generate the current estimates on which PBR calculations depend?

Sea lions have already been lethally removed at Bonneville Dam since 2008. What measurable, population-level salmon recovery can be attributed to that intervention?

What specific salmon-recovery outcomes will define success under H.R. 9621?

If additional salmon survive pinniped predation, how will managers determine whether those fish ultimately reach spawning grounds and contribute to recovery rather than becoming available to other predators or additional harvest?

And if salmon populations continue to decline after lethal authority is expanded, what mechanism will require Congress or managers to reconsider the underlying premise?

These questions matter because Pacific Northwest salmon populations have been shaped by far more than predation. Dams, habitat loss, harvest, artificial migration bottlenecks, hatchery practices, warming water and pollution have fundamentally altered the ecosystems through which salmon must survive.

As Dr. Ragen explained during my reporting, these pressures can push salmon populations so low that ordinary predation becomes disproportionately consequential. In other words, predation may become more damaging because humans have made salmon populations exceptionally vulnerable.

That changes the diagnosis.

Removing predators may sometimes be appropriate at particular locations where acute impacts can be demonstrated. But targeted intervention is fundamentally different from assuming that broader predator reduction will produce salmon recovery.

I respectfully ask the Subcommittee to require, before advancing H.R. 9621:

- current and scientifically defensible pinniped population estimates before lethal authorization;
- sustained funding for the monitoring required to establish and update PBR;
- clearly defined salmon-recovery objectives rather than pinniped-removal targets;
- independent scientific monitoring of salmon outcomes;
- rigorous evaluation of ecological and food-web consequences;
- preference for geographically targeted intervention rather than broad population reduction;
- periodic congressional review based on demonstrated recovery results; and
- serious federal action addressing the human-caused factors that continue to constrain salmon recovery.

I hope you will share these concerns, along with the enclosed *Columbia Insight* article, with members and staff of the Subcommittee as H.R. 9621 is considered further.

The measure of success should not be how many seals and sea lions are removed.

It should be **salmon recovered**.

Respectfully,

Ronald D. Reed

Founder/Director, Seven Generations Innovation

Enclosure: "Killing seals and sea lions won't solve the Northwest's salmon crisis," *Columbia Insight*, August 18, 2026