



August 24, 2026

The Honorable Michael Baumgartner

U.S. House of Representatives
1239 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

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

Dear Representative Baumgartner:

I am writing as one of your constituents regarding your sponsorship of H.R. 9621, the Northwest Endangered Salmon Predation Prevention Act.

I share the goal underlying this legislation: recovering Washington's imperiled salmon populations, protecting Southern Resident killer whales, and honoring the treaty fishing rights of tribal nations. These are serious responsibilities, and I appreciate the urgency surrounding them.

Where I respectfully disagree is with the conclusion that substantially expanding the lethal removal of seals and sea lions has been demonstrated to achieve those goals.

I recently examined this issue 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 they are adequately funded, carefully monitored and used to learn.

That distinction is important.

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

The question Congress should be asking is whether substantially expanding their killing across Washington waters will produce **measurable, population-level recovery of wild salmon**.

I do not believe the evidence presently demonstrates that it will.

The 2022 Washington State Academy of Sciences review, which has been cited in support of H.R. 9621, found evidence consistent with pinniped predation contributing to reduced salmon abundance. But the Academy also concluded that the evidence does **not support a definitive conclusion that pinnipeds are a primary cause of the lack of salmonid population recovery**.

That distinction matters enormously.

The Academy identified significant uncertainties regarding whether pinniped predation represents additional mortality or mortality that might otherwise occur, the role of alternative prey, and the complex food-web consequences that can follow from reducing predator populations.

For example, harbor seals eat salmon, but they also consume species such as Pacific hake that themselves prey heavily upon juvenile salmon. Fewer seals do not therefore automatically mean more surviving salmon.

There is also a fundamental monitoring problem in H.R. 9621 that I hope you will reconsider.

The legislation relies upon Potential Biological Removal as a biological safeguard. Yet how can Congress responsibly authorize lethal take based on a percentage of PBR when H.R. 9621 provides no sustained funding to monitor pinniped populations and generate the current population estimates on which those calculations depend?

Without adequate monitoring, the safeguard itself becomes questionable.

Casey McLean put the problem simply during my reporting: without a monitoring plan, how do we reliably know what the appropriate percentage of PBR actually is?

There are other basic questions that deserve answers before lethal authority is expanded.

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

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

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

And if salmon continue to decline after expanded lethal removal, what mechanism will require managers or Congress to reconsider the strategy itself?

These questions matter because pinnipeds did not create the Northwest salmon crisis.

Salmon populations were already being driven downward during periods when seal and sea lion populations themselves had been severely depleted. Dams, habitat loss, harvest, hatchery practices, warming waters, pollution and human-created migration bottlenecks have fundamentally altered the ecosystems through which salmon must survive.

Dr. Ragen described one consequence of these pressures as a “predator pit”: human activity can drive prey populations so low that ordinary predation then takes a disproportionately large share of what remains.

That changes the diagnosis.

Predation can become an important problem because we have made salmon populations exceptionally vulnerable.

There may be particular locations where individual pinnipeds create acute impacts and where carefully targeted intervention is scientifically justified. Existing management experience already demonstrates that such circumstances can occur.

But targeted intervention is fundamentally different from assuming that broader predator reduction will produce salmon recovery.

I also believe we should be cautious when describing expanded predator removal as restoring “ecosystem balance.”

The Columbia River Basin and Salish Sea are not pristine ecosystems waiting to be restored simply by reducing native predators. They have been profoundly reshaped by dams, development, pollution, harvest, hatcheries and climate change.

Removing one participant from an ecosystem we have dramatically altered while leaving many of the human-created pressures intact should not automatically be characterized as restoring balance.

As your constituent, I respectfully ask you to take another look at H.R. 9621 before it advances further.

I hope you will reconsider your sponsorship, or at minimum insist upon substantial revisions requiring:

- current and scientifically defensible pinniped population estimates before lethal authorization;
- sustained federal funding for the monitoring necessary 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 salmon-recovery results; and
- serious federal action addressing the human-caused factors that continue to constrain salmon recovery.

I am also sharing these concerns with members of the House Natural Resources Committee and its Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries because I believe these scientific and policy questions deserve careful consideration before H.R. 9621 advances.

We agree on the goal: more salmon.

The question is whether this legislation has demonstrated that expanded predator killing will get us there.

I do not believe it has.

I hope you and your colleagues in Congress will insist upon salmon recovery policy measured by **salmon recovered, not predators killed**.

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