



August 23, 2026

The Honorable Emily Randall
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 Randall,

I am writing regarding your July 21 testimony before the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries in support of H.R. 9621, the Northwest Endangered Salmon Predation Prevention Act.

I share your concern for Washington's imperiled salmon and Southern Resident killer whales, and I strongly agree that tribal treaty rights and the federal government's obligations to tribal nations must be honored. Our disagreement is not about whether salmon are in crisis. They are.

It is about whether substantially expanding the killing of seals and sea lions is scientifically justified as a salmon-recovery strategy.

In your testimony, you cited the 2022 Washington State Academy of Sciences review of pinniped predation. You stated that the study found pinniped predation to be an explanation for reduced salmon abundance and failure to recover.

That is part of what the Academy reported — but an important part of its conclusion was left out.

The Academy specifically found that the available evidence **does not support a definitive conclusion that pinnipeds are a primary cause of the lack of salmonid population recovery**. It identified major scientific uncertainties, including whether pinniped predation represents additional mortality or mortality that would otherwise occur, the role of alternative prey, and the complicated food-web effects created when pinnipeds consume other predators of salmon.

Those qualifications matter enormously when Congress is considering authorizing the killing of native marine mammals over a much broader geographic area.

The Academy did discuss strategic lethal removal, but it did so principally in the context of rigorous adaptive-management experiments — carefully designed interventions accompanied by monitoring, controls, ecosystem analysis and measurable salmon-recovery outcomes. That is very different from presuming that reducing pinniped populations will result in meaningful salmon recovery.

We have already learned how dangerous that presumption can be.

Humans have profoundly altered the Northwest ecosystems through which salmon must survive. We have dammed and channelized rivers, removed and degraded habitat, warmed waterways, altered estuaries, introduced toxic contaminants, harvested salmon, produced millions of hatchery fish and changed marine food webs. Artificial bottlenecks created by dams, locks and other structures can themselves concentrate salmon and make them unusually vulnerable to predators.

Yet again and again, when salmon decline, our attention turns toward the animals eating them.

That risks treating a symptom while leaving the underlying disease intact.

I recently examined this issue for *Columbia Insight*, interviewing Dr. Timothy Ragen, former executive director of the U.S. Marine Mammal Commission, and Casey McLean, executive director of Sealife Response, Rehabilitation, & Research (SR3). One question emerged repeatedly: **What evidence demonstrates that killing additional pinnipeds will produce measurable recovery of wild salmon populations?**

That should be the standard Congress applies.

The appropriate metric cannot simply be how many seals or sea lions are removed. It must be whether substantially more wild salmon survive, reproduce and contribute to self-sustaining populations as a result.

H.R. 9621 also arrives at a time when important pinniped population and mortality data are incomplete or outdated. Expanding lethal authority without sufficiently current population estimates, clearly defined recovery objectives, rigorous monitoring and scientifically meaningful measures of success risks creating an open-ended predator-control program whose effectiveness may be impossible to determine.

I also respectfully challenge the phrase used repeatedly in this debate that we must restore “ecosystem balance.” An ecosystem is not a machine with a historically fixed number of predators that humans can simply dial up or down. The Northwest ecosystem of today has been profoundly reshaped by us. Removing native predators while leaving the human-created conditions impairing salmon largely unchanged should not be confused with restoring ecological balance.

There may be specific locations where individual pinnipeds create unusually severe impacts and where carefully targeted intervention can be scientifically justified. Existing law already recognizes circumstances in which such management may occur.

But that is fundamentally different from opening broad new lethal authority across Washington waters before we can demonstrate that doing so will recover salmon.

I hope you will reconsider your support for H.R. 9621, or at minimum insist upon substantial changes requiring:

- current and scientifically defensible pinniped population estimates before lethal authorization;
- 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 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.

Salmon deserve more than another politically convenient explanation for their decline.

So do tribal nations whose treaty rights depend upon recovering them.

And seals and sea lions — native participants in these ecosystems — should not become substitutes for the much harder work required of us.

I hope Congress will insist on salmon recovery policy measured by **salmon recovered**, not predators killed.

Respectfully,

Ronald D. Reed
Seven Generations Innovation