



August 24, 2026

The Honorable Val Hoyle, Ranking Member
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 Ranking Member Hoyle:

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

As someone in the Pacific Northwest, you understand particularly well how deeply salmon are woven into our region — ecologically, economically and culturally. The obligation to recover them is inseparable from tribal treaty rights, commercial and recreational fisheries, Southern Resident killer whales and the health of the Columbia River Basin.

My concern is that H.R. 9621 risks confusing the existence of pinniped predation with evidence that broadly expanding lethal removal will produce salmon recovery.

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 and Research (SR3). I am enclosing that article for your consideration.

Neither of these experts dismissed pinniped predation. Dr. Ragen has participated in federal task forces examining pinniped interactions with salmon at Bonneville Dam and Willamette Falls and has supported targeted removal where individual animals create acute impacts on highly endangered runs. McLean similarly acknowledged that narrowly

targeted removals may sometimes be justified when they are scientifically supported, adequately funded and carefully monitored.

That distinction should be central to the Subcommittee's consideration of H.R. 9621.

The question is not whether pinnipeds eat salmon.

The question is whether broader killing will leave substantially more wild salmon alive to reach spawning grounds, reproduce and rebuild self-sustaining populations.

The Washington State Academy of Sciences review cited in testimony supporting H.R. 9621 provides important context. While the Academy found evidence consistent with pinniped predation contributing to depressed salmon populations, it specifically concluded that the evidence does **not support a definitive conclusion that pinnipeds are a primary cause of failed salmon recovery.**

The Academy also emphasized substantial ecological uncertainty and called for strategic adaptive-management experiments accompanied by intensive monitoring and adequate funding.

H.R. 9621 raises a particularly troubling problem in that respect.

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

That is not a minor administrative issue. It goes directly to whether the bill's principal biological safeguard can be implemented reliably.

There are other unanswered questions as well.

Sea lions have been lethally removed at Bonneville Dam since 2008. What measurable, population-level salmon recovery has resulted?

What outcome will Congress use to determine that expanded lethal removal under H.R. 9621 is succeeding?

If salmon continue to decline after additional pinnipeds are killed, will managers reassess the strategy — or simply expand removal further?

And how will the legislation account for food-web effects in which pinnipeds consume other predators of juvenile salmon?

These questions matter because the salmon crisis did not originate with recovering pinniped populations.

Salmon were already being driven downward during the cannery era and decades of dam construction while seals and sea lions themselves had been severely depleted. Today, more than 40 percent of historically available Columbia River Basin salmon and steelhead spawning and rearing habitat remains permanently blocked by dams. Habitat degradation, warming water, harvest, hatcheries, pollution and human-created migration bottlenecks continue to constrain recovery.

Predation may exacerbate a population already made vulnerable by these pressures. But that is different from establishing predation as the underlying cause of failure.

I respectfully urge you to insist that any legislation expanding lethal authority require:

- current and scientifically defensible pinniped population estimates;
- sustained funding for population monitoring and PBR calculations;
- measurable salmon-recovery objectives;
- independent monitoring of salmon outcomes;
- evaluation of food-web and ecosystem consequences;
- preference for targeted intervention at demonstrated problem locations;
- meaningful review of other major sources of salmon mortality; and
- periodic reassessment based on whether wild salmon populations actually improve.

I hope you will share this letter and the enclosed *Columbia Insight* article with your colleagues and staff as the Subcommittee continues its consideration of H.R. 9621.

There is substantial common ground here. Everyone involved wants more salmon.

That shared goal gives Congress a clear standard by which this legislation should be judged: not how many predators it allows us to remove, but whether it leaves more self-sustaining wild salmon swimming Northwest rivers decades from now.

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