



August 24, 2026

The Honorable Jared Huffman, Ranking Member

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 Huffman:

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

I hope you and the Committee will scrutinize a fundamental scientific question before this legislation advances:

What evidence demonstrates that substantially expanding lethal removal of seals and sea lions will produce measurable, population-level recovery of wild salmon?

I recently explored that question in an article for *Columbia Insight*, which I am enclosing. My reporting included interviews with 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).

Their perspectives were nuanced.

Neither argued that pinniped predation is irrelevant. Dr. Ragen has served on federal task forces addressing pinniped interactions with salmon at Bonneville Dam and Willamette Falls and has supported removal of individual animals where endangered salmon face acute losses. McLean similarly acknowledged that carefully targeted removals can sometimes be scientifically justified when adequately funded, monitored and used to learn.

But neither of those circumstances establishes that broader lethal removal will recover salmon populations.

The 2022 Washington State Academy of Sciences review underscores this distinction. The Academy found that existing evidence is consistent with pinniped predation contributing to reduced salmon abundance. It simultaneously concluded that the evidence does **not support a definitive conclusion that pinnipeds are a primary cause of the lack of salmonid population recovery.**

The report identified substantial uncertainty concerning additive versus compensatory mortality, alternative prey and indirect food-web effects. It specifically recommended strategic, appropriately scaled adaptive management accompanied by intensive monitoring and adequate resources.

That makes one feature of H.R. 9621 particularly concerning.

The legislation authorizes lethal take using Potential Biological Removal as a limiting mechanism, yet provides no sustained funding to generate and monitor the pinniped population estimates necessary to calculate PBR responsibly.

How can a biological limit function as a meaningful safeguard when Congress has not ensured that the data needed to establish and update that limit will exist?

I believe several other questions deserve answers before the Committee advances the bill:

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 recovery metric will determine whether H.R. 9621 succeeds?

How will managers distinguish salmon saved by predator removal from salmon subsequently lost to dams, harvest, warming water, degraded habitat, other predators or other sources of mortality?

How will food-web consequences be monitored when pinnipeds themselves consume predators of juvenile salmon, including Pacific hake?

And if expanded lethal control fails to improve salmon populations, what mechanism will require the policy itself to be reconsidered?

These questions are particularly important because pinnipeds did not create the salmon crisis.

Salmon populations were already collapsing during the late nineteenth-century cannery boom and decades of dam construction while pinniped populations themselves were severely depleted. Today, dams and blocked habitat, mixed-stock harvest, hatchery practices, pollution, warming waters and human-created migration bottlenecks continue to affect salmon survival.

Dr. Ragen described the resulting condition to me as a “predator pit”: human pressures can drive prey populations so low that ordinary predation then removes a disproportionate share of what remains.

That does not absolve predation from consideration.

It means the scientifically responsible response is to evaluate **all significant sources of mortality** and determine through genuine adaptive management which interventions measurably improve salmon survival.

I therefore respectfully ask you to oppose H.R. 9621 in its present form, or insist upon substantial revisions requiring:

- current and scientifically defensible pinniped population estimates;
- sustained federal funding for population monitoring and reliable PBR calculations;
- clearly defined salmon-recovery outcomes;
- independent scientific monitoring;
- analysis of food-web and ecosystem effects;
- targeted intervention where specific impacts are demonstrated rather than broad population reduction;
- comparison of predator management with other salmon-recovery interventions; and
- periodic congressional review based upon actual salmon recovery.

I hope you will share this letter and the enclosed *Columbia Insight* article with relevant Committee and Subcommittee members and staff as H.R. 9621 is considered further.

Salmon recovery demands serious action.

But Congress should measure that action 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