

## **A Dream for Restoring Wild Snake River Salmon and Steelhead**

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In the spirit of Martin Luther King Jr's 1963 - *I Have a Dream Speech*

Ten millennia ago, a great resource was flourishing in the Columbia River basin in the form of ocean going fish. These magnificent creatures classified anadromous are salmon, steelhead and pacific lamprey. They were and continue to be economically and spiritually central to Northwest Tribal cultures. They provided the sustenance for survival for the early inhabitants. The salmon and lamprey were captured as they returned on great spawning runs at falls and rapids in the mainstem Columbia and Snake River tributaries.

When the Native Americans ceded vast areas of land to the United States the Tribes retained a right to fish in all usual and accustomed places. That promise was to be kept as long as the sun shines, the mountains stand and the river runs.

But 150 years later we face unsustainable populations of wild salmon and lamprey in the Snake River. The federal government guaranteed to all mankind they would continue to prosper despite habitat destruction in the form of dam construction in the mainstem Columbia and Snake Rivers. Mainstem hydro development has turned vibrant rivers into slow moving reservoirs where the river no longer runs but crawls. The dams themselves represent a most dreadful condition in the salmon's natural habitat.

The federal government is defaulting on its promissory note by allowing wild Snake River salmon and lamprey to continue to slide toward extinction. Instead of honoring and respecting treaty rights and preserving these wild creatures for future generations, the federal government is bent on preserving the status quo by issuing a bad check marked "insufficient funds". It is difficult to believe the bank of salmon preservation is bankrupt.

We refuse to believe there are insufficient funds in the vast vaults of opportunity of this great nation. There is a sense of urgency. Now is the time to engage in a national debate of restoring a segment of the salmon's natural ecosystem. Now is the time to lift the Northwest from the quicksands of ignorance and move toward a free flowing river in the lower Snake and normative spill levels in the Columbia River.

We must forever conduct our struggle on the high plane of dignity and discipline using the best science, economics and methodology to ensure that all involved stay whole in the process. We cannot walk alone on this issue.

The conversation must advance the federal government to promise that all of the data be transparent in an honest and candid way for all to follow and understand. There must be no scared proclamations clouding the debate. We must not turn back. We must forge ahead with haste.

Go back to Stanley, go back to Salmon, go back to Lemhi, go back to Yellowpine, go back to Powell, go back to Elk City, go back to La Grande and Imnaha knowing this pretense can and will be corrected. Let us not wallow in the valley of despair.

We say to you that in spite of the difficulties and frustrations of the moment we still have a dream. It is rooted in an American Dream of sustained ecosystems and resource conservation. We have a dream that one-day the lower Snake River will run free, unencumbered by the monoliths of the 1960s and 1970s that are so devastating to America's most cherished icons.

We have a dream that one-day wild salmon and lamprey will once again flourish in the arteries of the Snake River.

We have a dream one-day policy makers and politicians will no longer hide behind the barrel of pork that traditionally subsidized aluminum makers and commodity shippers resulting in the destruction of this most valued resource at great public expense.

We have a dream one-day that the federal government will no longer hide behind irrational public policy for political expediency.

We have a dream one-day that the federal government will honor its obligations to the Native Americans and uphold its trust responsibilities as mandated in time honored Treaties.

If the Northwest is to flourish into the 21-century let the salmon run free to and from the arteries of the Snake River to the great North Pacific Ocean and back.

Let the salmon run free to and from Fish Creek in the Lochsa

Let the salmon run free to and from Moose Creek in the Selway

Let the salmon run free to and from the Chamberlain Basin

Let the salmon run free to and from the meadows of the Middle Fork

Let the salmon run free to and from the Secesh

Let the salmon run free to and from the Eagle Cap and Wenaha

Let the salmon run free