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# **Willamette Salmon Welcome Packet**

**for 119<sup>th</sup> Congress**



# Introduction

Dear Members of the 119th Congress:

The Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde (Grand Ronde) look forward to collaborating with you to support Oregon families and businesses while protecting native Chinook salmon and steelhead in the Willamette River Basin. We appreciate the efforts of the Oregon and Pacific Northwest delegations for representing our region and ensuring our voice is heard at the federal level. Thank you for your service to our communities.

As you continue to settle into your term and lead on important work for your constituents, we look forward to continuing our work together and building on the recent progress we've made on an issue close to our hearts and communities.

Grand Ronde is a federally recognized Tribe that includes over 30 Tribes and bands from western Oregon, northern California, and southwest Washington. Since time immemorial, tribal people have relied on traditional landscapes, including the Willamette River, for our livelihood. While the original tribes and bands of the Willamette Basin were forcibly removed to the Grand Ronde Reservation at the western edge of the Basin, our connections to our homelands and traditions have remained unbroken.

However, a central part of that connection – resources that we have relied upon since time immemorial – remains under threat. The native salmon and steelhead of the Willamette River Basin are facing extinction, possibly as soon as 2040 if we don't act now. With your continued help, we can restore the population while cutting energy costs for Oregon businesses and families – a win-win.

Grand Ronde is committed to saving native salmon through the deauthorization of hydropower at Willamette River Basin dams, as well as seasonal deep drawdowns of reservoirs. Together, we can hold the Army Corps of Engineers accountable, cut wasteful spending, lower costs for Oregon communities, and restore salmon populations, benefiting both the environment and the economy.

Enclosed in this packet, you will find several resources to help you and your offices communicate to community and government stakeholders why we must deauthorize hydropower in the Willamette to save Oregonians money and protect native salmon.

We look forward to partnering with you on this critical issue for our people, Oregon, and the Pacific Northwest.

Sincerely,



**Kathleen George**

Councilwoman

Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde

# Key Messages



## Deauthorizing Hydropower Will Save Money, Cut Wasteful Government Spending, and Protect Native Salmon

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### Hydropower at the Willamette River Basin Costs Oregonians Money and Imperils Endangered Salmon

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- From Tribes and fishing groups, to utilities and local officials—a broad coalition of diverse voices in Oregon supports the deauthorization of hydropower in the Willamette because it simply does not pencil out.
- The meager amount of power produced at these dams is coming at a huge cost to Oregonians. We know deauthorization is necessary, but it's critical that we educate the public while pushing for this transition so that we have full community support.
- The Corps' own analysis found that the dams would lose a stunning \$939 million over the next 30 years because the cost of generation far outweighs the revenue.
- Given those numbers, it's no surprise that Congress has again demanded that the Corps study the effects of removing hydropower before the agency pursues expensive and unproven fish passage structures.
- The eight hydropower dams in the Willamette system produce less than 2% of the total power produced by the federal government Federal Columbia River Power System.

### Willamette River Basin Dams Endanger Salmon

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- These dams block access to 75% of the basin's critical salmon and steelhead spawning habitat and further harm fish and the river by altering natural flows, diminishing water quality, and degrading riparian environments.
- Less than 3,200 late run winter steelhead – considered to be the native run that historically crossed Willamette Falls – returned on average from 2008 to 2020. This is nearly 70% less than the 1970s when data was first available.
- Over 90% of the historic spawning, incubation, and rearing habitat for Upper Willamette River Chinook has been blocked by dams in the Middle Fork Willamette River subbasin.
- A 2024 [study](#) from NOAA Fisheries found that because of the salmon's lack of passage around the Willamette River Basin dams, they face a higher risk of extinction by about 2040.

Deauthorizing Hydropower Will Save Money, Cut Wasteful Government Spending, and Protect Native Salmon (cont.)

### Salmon Has Cultural Significance to Tribes and Oregon

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- This issue is near to the heart of the Grand Ronde people, who have lived with salmon forever. But it's also about all Oregonians – these fish are iconic to the region and rely on healthy waterways.

### The Corps Must Follow the Law and Evaluate Removing Hydropower at the Willamette River Basin Dams to Save Oregonians Money on their Power Bills and Protect Willamette Salmon

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- Congress passed a bipartisan law—WRDA 2024—requiring the Corps to evaluate an alternative at the Willamette River Basin dams that removes the costly hydropower that's imperiling salmon.
- The directive in WRDA 2024 requires the Corps to thoroughly evaluate solutions that will cut power costs to Oregon families and businesses and to improve fish passage.
- Congress has required the Corps to study the effects of deauthorizing hydropower in the Willamette Valley twice in WRDA 2020 and 2022, but the agency has missed deadlines to submit key reports. WRDA 2024 marks the third time Congress has requested the Corps study this issue.
- In addition to stalling the studies, the Corps is planning to install fish collection machines that have not yet proven to be effective and would cost hundreds of millions of dollars to help salmon pass the dams.
- We are running out of time to capitalize on a prime opportunity to cut wasteful spending and protect endangered Chinook and steelhead.



## Drawdowns Help Boost Juvenile Salmon Populations— At Less Cost

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### Drawdowns are an important management tool that must continue

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- We know that if we provide downstream passage, salmon populations have a chance to survive and return in meaningful numbers. After lowering the reservoir pool during juvenile migration at Fall Creek, the Corps' data showed roughly a **ten-fold increase** in the adult salmon that later returned to Fall Creek—at virtually no cost.
- Corps' **studies** “indicate a 98-99% survival rate” for out-migrating Chinook juveniles at Fall Creek during the 2015 deep drawdown.
- At the nearby Clackamas River Basin, salmon and steelhead are allowed more free movement throughout the dam systems, leading to one of the strongest salmon and steelhead runs in the Willamette Valley.
- Low reservoir levels keep surrounding communities safe from floods. Deep drawdown is a solution that helps salmon and people.

### Turbidity will lessen with time

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- We agree that communities across the Willamette Valley need clean water to drink, and we hear their concerns.
- We are committed to working with impacted communities and state and federal leaders to craft long-term solutions to ensure clean drinking water.
- While each dam is different, the success at Fall Creek provides strong evidence that drawdown can work and that turbidity, which makes the water cloudy, will lessen with time.
- Research from Lookout Point and Green Peter reservoir, as well as the deep drawdown conducted at Fall Creek Lake, found that the river quickly cleared up, and Corps officials say the sediment most likely did not harm young salmon and helped restore the river's ecology by washing sediment and organisms downriver.
- It's not a matter of fish versus us. Native salmon are part of the heritage of all Oregonians, including the Native peoples of the region that have depended on them since time immemorial.

THE ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS CAN

# SAVE SALMON AND MONEY IN THE WILLAMETTE RIVER BASIN

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers can cut costs for families and businesses and protect endangered salmon by drawing down reservoirs.

Hydropower production in the Willamette River Basin is uneconomical.

The Corps' own analysis found that the dams would lose a stunning \$939 million<sup>1</sup> over the next 30 years because the **cost of generation far outweighs the revenue.**

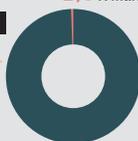
### THE COST PROBLEM



### POWER PRODUCTION

Federal Columbia River Power System

2% Willamette River Basin



Willamette River Basin dams are killing salmon.

The dams block access to 75% of the basin's critical salmon and steelhead spawning habitat.



Less than 3% of historic wild Chinook runs return to the Upper Willamette River Basin each year.



### THE SOLUTION:

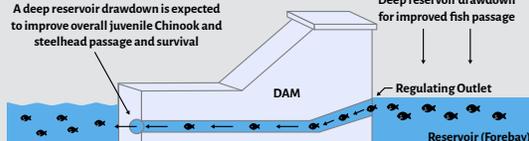
Deauthorizing hydropower at Willamette River Basin dams will save money and salmon.

By drawing down the Willamette River Basin reservoirs, the Corps can return the river to a more natural flow and restore endangered salmon populations.

Drawdowns can successfully pass juvenile salmon through dams. After conducting drawdowns at Fall Creek Reservoir, the Corps witnessed a **tenfold increase** in the adult salmon that later returned to Fall Creek - at very low cost.

### DEEP DRAWDOWN

A deep reservoir drawdown is expected to improve overall juvenile Chinook and steelhead passage and survival



Deep reservoir drawdown for improved fish passage

Regulating Outlet

Reservoir (Forebay)

### THE CORPS SHOULD

# PRIORITIZE SALMON RECOVERY OVER EXPENSIVE HYDROPOWER

Sources: <sup>1</sup>U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Portland District (November 2022), Willamette Valley System Operations and Maintenance Draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement at E-44. <https://www.usace.army.mil/Willamette/collect/2022/02/20220220>. <sup>2</sup>U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Portland District (November 2022), Willamette Valley System Operations and Maintenance Draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement at E-390. <https://www.usace.army.mil/Willamette/collect/2022/02/20220220>. <sup>3</sup>U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Willamette Valley Project, Fall Creek Deep Drawdown. <https://www.nps.usace.army.mil/Willamette/Fall-Creek-Drawdown>

# Core Asks



## **Deauthorize hydropower**

at the Willamette River Basin dams.



## **Continue deep drawdowns**

as a tool to help juvenile salmon.



## **Ensure that the Corps has the resources it needs**

to carry out recommendations in the Biological Opinion issued in December 2024 and to analyze a no-power alternative.

## Contact Information

For more information,  
visit [grandronde.org](https://grandronde.org) or  
email [info@grandronde.org](mailto:info@grandronde.org)



@CTGRgov



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# **Save Willamette River Salmon**

**Unplug Willamette Hydropower**