



## *Current Reflections*

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### **Let's Stay Focused on Realistic Salmon Solutions**

The Washington Post reported this week that divorce is bad for the environment. Researchers found that when couples divorce, it creates more households with fewer occupants and thus higher per-person use of energy and water. Married households are more efficient, researchers say, because there are more people sharing resources like heat and lighting.

Who knew? But now that we do, we need to get a handle on the problem. Shall we consign divorced singles to communes until they remarry? Require them to buy carbon offsets or plant trees? Set up mandatory government-funded matchmaking services to hasten the pairing up?

Sound extreme, illogical, and over the top? Of course it does.

Those are the same terms one might apply to recent statements by Northwest chefs and killer-whale researchers advocating Snake River dam removal. The chefs think taking out the dams is the way to keep salmon on dinner plates in the region, and whale researchers think it's a reasonable step toward putting orca populations on the rebound.

Aside from being a stretch, both pose an extreme and simplistic solution to a complex problem.

The whale scientists' letter to National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries links the need for more abundant food sources for Puget Sound orcas with the recovery of Chinook salmon. It falls victim to the erroneous thinking that removing four federal Snake River dams is the only way to avert salmon extinction and that other measures aren't working. A comprehensive review by experts on Columbia River salmon determined earlier this year that other actions are working and most listed species are trending toward recovery.



A NOAA Fisheries official told one news source there is no evidence that resident Puget Sound orcas eat salmon from the Snake River. And a December 2006 *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* (P-I) article cites several reasons other than a lack of Chinook salmon to explain the plight of the Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed orcas. The P-I said an increase in industrial pollution which makes orcas susceptible to disease and reduces fertility; disruption by boats and ships; and historical catches have all contributed to the orcas' decline.



The chefs' reason for touting dam removal is more puzzling. There are still plenty of salmon available to diners – including a fair percentage of Columbia River Chinook – caught in the commercial fishery off southeast Alaska and elsewhere. The chefs also seem confused about the difference between wild and hatchery-raised salmon and the impact of harvest on salmon listed under the ESA. The wild ESA-listed stocks, including Snake River Chinook, are often caught at the same rate as relatively abundant hatchery-raised salmon produced specifically for harvest. Wild salmon stocks can't sustain significant harvest and still recover. And it is worth noting there aren't any other endangered species that people demand the right to kill and eat.

Salmon recovery is serious business. At RiverPartners, we are working toward science-based, cost-effective, and balanced solutions. The region has good credible information, including decades of scientific research on Columbia and Snake River salmon that is guiding us to solutions. These remedies do not require the Pacific Northwest to divest itself of its invaluable, renewable, carbon-free hydroelectricity and a river system that provides myriad other benefits.

Dams and salmon can coexist. We are not unsympathetic to the orcas or to salmon-loving diners. But we *are* unsympathetic to extreme solutions, like dam removal, that are neither necessary nor reasonable. Despite the increasingly shrill campaign against the Snake River dams, RiverPartners intends to help the region stay focused on a realistic path toward salmon recovery, a path that addresses all the factors that affect salmon throughout their lifecycle: hydro, habitat, hatcheries, and yes, harvest.

Northwest RiverPartners is a partnership of farmers, electric utilities and large and small businesses in the Pacific Northwest, joined together to ensure that the Columbia and Snake rivers remain living, working rivers. It was founded on the belief that these rivers are the Northwest's greatest natural resource providing residents with clean, affordable and renewable electricity, flood control, irrigation for our farm lands, healthy fish and wildlife, maritime trade, and a multitude of recreational opportunities. For more information, please visit [www.nwriverpartners.org](http://www.nwriverpartners.org).