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June 29, 2021

The Honorable Jay Inslee
Governor of Washington
PO Box 40002
Olympia, WA 98504-0002

Dear Governor Inslee:

The Cedar River Council (CRC) in our letter of July 11, 2019, alerted you to the near-collapse of the once robust Cedar River sockeye run that exceeded 400,000 in 2006 and the tenuous status of other salmonids in the Cedar River Basin, including Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed Chinook. Unfortunately, numbers of both these species have dropped further since 2019 with only 3,000 sockeye and less than 300 wild Chinook reaching the Cedar River to spawn last fall. Given current trends, and without massive intervention, these species could join the once wonderful run of wild Cedar River steelhead, which is now functionally extinct. The time for collective and significant action is nearly gone. Chinook salmon recovery efforts are guided by the work of the Lake Washington/Cedar/Sammamish Watershed (WRIA 8) Salmon Recovery Council, whereas sockeye recovery does not have a similar venue for effective collective action. Hence, our July 11, 2019, letter is bringing attention to this sockeye decline.

In addition, it is important to note the tremendous financial investment that has been made in Cedar River salmonid preservation and recovery over the last 25 years. Derived from an assortment of Federal, State, Tribal, Regional, and Local government funding sources and appropriations, nearly \$100,000,000 has been expended and devoted to natural habitat restoration, as well as the Landsburg Hatchery itself, to serve these purposes. This signals emphatically a willingness by all parties to protect and enhance these fish in the short and long term. However, given the rapid collapse of what were once robust runs of Cedar River sockeye, as well a severe reversal of fortune for Chinook as an ESA-listed endangered species, we think it imperative that our co-managers, the state, and local governments begin to look at the water quality issues associated with the Cedar River, Lake Washington, and the Ship Canal to fully understand the reasons behind the collapse of these runs, and to maximize the investments already made in the Cedar. Depending on an emergency use of spring water at the Landsburg Hatchery to promote survival of these fish, which have used the Cedar naturally for thousands of years, it begs the question: what is wrong with the water in the Cedar and adjacent waters?

The intent of this letter is to, first, express appreciation for your personal support and involvement of J.T. Austin of your senior staff over this past year, as significant activities have begun which could lead to actions that might save the sockeye and Chinook runs. Secondly, we ask that your office continue to provide oversight and support for an effective collaborative recovery effort by the State of Washington, City of Seattle, King County, Muckleshoot Tribe, Seattle District Corps of Engineers, and others, including the caring public. Funding from multiple sources is likely to be required.

Our July 11, 2019, letter requested the following:

- Direct the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) to assemble appropriate parties to address current Cedar River sockeye decline and develop immediate emergency actions to be implemented to prevent the extinction of Cedar River sockeye; and
- To have discussions with you and CRC leadership regarding this urgent matter.

We are pleased to report that those requests have largely been honored. Ms. Austin spoke for your office in a November 17, 2020, email in which she asked Jim Scott, Special Assistant to WDFW Director Kelly Susewind, to share with the CRC, which he did during a Zoom call presentation on January 26, 2021. Mr. Scott assembled last year a panel of scientists and fish experts known as the Lake Washington Technical Working Group to perform a feasibility assessment of short and long-term actions that could make a difference. He has also facilitated joint action by WDFW, the Muckleshoot Indian Tribe, and the City of Seattle to increase the survival of adult sockeye for spawning at the Seattle Public Utilities Landsburg Hatchery. A cooperative experiment is planned for July involving the direct transfer of about 300 adult sockeye from the Ballard Locks to the hatchery to see if pre-spawn mortality can be reduced. During the May 25, 2021, CRC Zoom meeting, Mr. Scott provided a status update. He was joined by Dr. Fred Goetz of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers who discussed water quality issues of the Lake Washington Ship Canal that may be linked to adult sockeye pre-spawn mortality and, to some extent, Chinook salmon.

The CRC is thoroughly impressed and grateful for WDFW stepping forward through Mr. Scott as part of a last-ditch effort to save and restore the Cedar River sockeye run to harvestable numbers. However, we appreciate that the sockeye run has been treasured by more than anglers. Hundreds of thousands of visitors come to the Ballard Locks each year, many during the July sockeye run, to watch with fascination the movement of these fish at the fish ladder viewing window.

There is considerable media interest in the Cedar River sockeye as attested by several articles in the *Seattle Times* and in sport fishing publications. We anticipate television news to focus on this issue as well, as KING 5 News has done with the relicensing of the Skagit River Basin hydroelectric dams.

We anticipate that, late this fall, a presentation by the Technical Working Group will be made, hopefully in a public gathering in Renton during a CRC meeting. The CRC has held public meetings about the status of Cedar River salmon runs in 2018 and 2019. As our July 11, 2019, letter reported, during the April 2019 meeting, the attending public was overwhelmingly supportive of taking actions to save and restore the sockeye run. They were not ready to “throw in the towel” and let this valuable resource disappear.

Sir, we respectfully ask that you confirm your commitment to the ongoing collective effort to save and restore the Cedar River sockeye run, enabling a return to once wonderful tribal and public fisheries on Lake Washington. This may include encouraging key parties to pursue specific projects and supporting State funding of some of the recovery actions.

Thank you,



Max Prinsen
Chair, Cedar River Council

CC: Kelly Susewind, Director, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW)
Jim Scott, Special Assistant to the Director, WDFW
Jaison Elkins, Chair, Muckleshoot Indian Tribe
J.T. Austin, Senior Policy Advisor, Natural Resources, Office of the Governor, State of Washington
Water Resource Inventory Area (WRIA) 8 Coordination Team
Dow Constantine, King County Executive
Christie True, Director, King County Department of Natural Resources and Parks (DNRP)
Josh Baldi, Director, King County DNRP Water and Land Resources Division
Jenny Durkan, Mayor of the City of Seattle
The Hon. Pramila Jayapal, U.S. Representative, Washington Congressional District 7
The Hon. David Adam Smith, U.S. Representative, Washington Congressional District 9
The Hon. Kim Schrier, M.D., U.S. Representative, Washington Congressional District 8
The Hon. Patty Murray, U.S. Senator for the State of Washington
The Hon. Maria Cantwell, U.S. Senator for the State of Washington
Reagan Dunn, King County Councilmember
Jeanne Kohl-Welles, King County Councilmember
Lynda V. Mapes, *Seattle Times*
Danny Westneat, *Seattle Times*
Col. Alexander L. Bullock, Seattle District Commander, US Army Corps of Engineers

