

July 20, 2026

TO: The Honorable Patty Muray, United States Senate
The Honorable Maria Cantwell, United States Senate
The Honorable Suzan DelBene, United States House of Representatives
The Honorable Rick Larsen, United States House of Representatives
The Honorable Marie Gluesenkamp Perez, United States House of Representatives
The Honorable Dan Newhouse, United States House of Representatives
The Honorable Michael Baumgartner, United States House of Representatives
The Honorable Emily Randall, United States House of Representatives
The Honorable Pramila Jayapal, United States House of Representatives
The Honorable Kim Schrier, M.D., United States House of Representatives
The Honorable Adam Smith, United States House of Representatives
The Honorable Marilyn Strickland, United States House of Representatives

FROM: Kate Dean, Vice Chair
Puget Sound Partnership Leadership Council

SUBJECT: ***The Northwest Endangered Salmon Predation Prevention Act of 2026***

The Puget Sound Partnership Leadership Council is the [statutorily](#) designated regional salmon [recovery organization for Puget Sound salmon species](#), in part because the health of salmon populations reflects the overall health of Puget Sound. Unfortunately, we remain far from [our recovery goal](#): self-sustaining, harvestable salmon runs that contribute to the overall health of Puget Sound and its watersheds and allow us to enjoy and use these precious resources alongside a strong regional economy. Moreover, upholding treaty rights for Puget Sound tribes depends on recovering those salmon runs.

While restoring, protecting, and improving access to critical habitat remain essential tools for recovering salmon in Puget Sound, the ecological response time for such efforts can lag for years or even decades behind project completion. Endangered Puget Sound salmon cannot wait that long, and more immediate interventions are needed.

It is well-documented that populations of harbor seals, Steller sea lions, and California sea lions (pinnipeds) have increased in the Salish Sea since Congress passed the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) in 1972. In a 2022 [report](#) commissioned by the Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife (WDFW), the Washington State Academy of Sciences (WSAS) concluded that pinniped predation is a “plausible explanation” for reduced abundance of salmon in Washington State waters and an impediment to salmon recovery despite efforts to protect them.

Several of our adopted recovery plans point to the need to address pinniped predation on Endangered Puget Sound salmon. [Strategy 15](#) in the 2022-2026 Puget Sound Action Agenda calls for “reduc(ing) displacement, competition, and predation of imperiled native species caused by native or invasive species” through several key opportunities, including to:

- Continue and secure sustainable funding for pinniped population assessments and diet studies;
- Advance discussions with co-managers about science-supported, Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA)-grounded options for reducing pinniped predation;
- Implement, assess, and learn from pinniped predation deterrence pilot studies in Puget Sound and removals in the Columbia River.

Likewise, in its final [report](#), the Southern Resident Killer Whale Task Force recommended that appropriate state agencies “work with Tribes and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to determine if pinniped predation is a limiting factor for Chinook in Puget Sound and along Washington’s outer coast and evaluate potential management actions.”

During [our quarterly meeting last month](#), we convened a conversation with the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission (NWIFC), the NOAA, and WDFW to consider the NWIFC’s assessment of pinniped management options available under the MMPA and discuss potential next steps. That discussion resulted in an emerging consensus amongst the tribal, federal, and state representatives around the need for additional flexibility and resources not currently provided under the MMPA. More specifically:

- Federally recognized treaty tribes should be eligible for the same sort of delegated management authority currently afforded to states under Sections 109 and 120 of the MMPA.
- Piloting the removal of pinnipeds in certain geographic zones within Puget Sound that meet specific criteria as “hot spots” could help inform research into the efficacy of such removals. These criteria should be sufficiently flexible to enable management actions concurrent with the best available science.
- As Congress provided with Section 120(f) of the MMPA, pinniped management in designated geographic areas of Puget Sound should not rely on a laborious, infeasible “individually identifiable” threshold for action.
- Additional federal investment will be necessary to enable any meaningful action.

[The Northwest Endangered Salmon Predation Prevention Act of 2026](#) appears to be directionally consistent with these recommendations, and we are encouraged by its introduction. Ultimately, the specifics of implementation will matter a great deal for the effectiveness and appropriateness of this legislation for recovering salmon. To that end, we recommend close, continuous consultation with Washington's treaty tribes and Washington state agencies as the legislative process unfolds.

Thank you for your continued leadership and service on behalf of the citizens of Washington state.



Kate Dean, Vice Chair
Puget Sound Partnership Leadership Council

cc: Jennifer Quan, West Coast Regional Administrator, NOAA
Justin Parker, Executive Director, NWIFC
Kelly Susewind, Director, WDFW
Mindy Roberts, Executive Director, Puget Sound Partnership
Rose Minor, Director of Federal and Interstate Affairs, Office of Governor Bob Ferguson