

American Rivers * Coastal Conservation Association * Federation of Fly Fishers * Pacific Rivers Council * The Conservation Angler * Trout Unlimited * Washington Fly Fishing Club
Wild Fish Conservancy * Wild Salmon Center * Wild Steelhead Coalition

April 19, 2011

Robert Elofson , Natural Resource Director
Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe
Tribal Center
2851 Lower Elwha Road
Port Angeles, Washington 98363

Karen Gustin, Superintendent
Olympic National Park
600 East Park Avenue
Port Angeles, Washington 98362

Phil Anderson, Director
Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
600 Capitol Way North
Olympia, Washington 98501

William W. Stelle, Jr.,
Regional Administrator and
West Coast Salmon Coordinator
NOAA – National Marine Fisheries Service
Northwest Regional Office
7600 Sand Point Way NE
Seattle, Washington 98115

Robyn Thorson, Regional Director
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Pacific Region
911 NE 11th Avenue
Portland, Oregon 97232

Dear Madams and Sirs:

We, the undersigned organizations working to ensure both the recovery of wild salmon and steelhead and sustainable fisheries based on sound science, write to request a meeting with you to discuss pressing issues regarding the effort to restore anadromous fish to the Elwha River Basin. With dam removal scheduled to commence in September 2011, the need is urgent to have the best possible fish restoration plan in place to ensure that this world-class restoration project achieves its full potential.

It is hard to overstate the importance of the Elwha restoration project from both an ecological recovery potential standpoint and the standpoint of obtaining scientific information necessary to eliminate uncertainties that have vexed resource managers, particularly salmon and steelhead managers, for decades. In both respects the Elwha restoration project is in a league of its own -- not just in the Pacific Northwest or even North America, but in the world. As such, it warrants use of the best science and best management we can muster to ensure that its full potential is realized so that not only it succeeds, but also so that it provides the impetus for more river basin-scale restoration projects.

We wish to commend your staff members who have developed the Elwha River Fish Restoration Plan (April 2008), which sets forth the details of the fish restoration effort that will be central to this project. Much of its content appears to be scientifically supported and forward-thinking. In particular, we want to state our support for the Plan's stated priorities: "re-establishing self-sustaining anadromous salmonid populations and habitats, maintaining the integrity of existing salmonid genetic and life history diversity, maintaining fish health, and restoring physical and biological processes of the ecosystem." (Plan at xiv), with one critical exception regarding the

use of the word “existing” that we would like to discuss with you when we meet and that is touched on in the paragraph below.

There are, however, several aspects of the Fish Restoration Plan that could thwart achievement of your stated priorities and our objectives for the Elwha. Chief among them are: (1) the continued planting of out-of-basin hatchery winter steelhead; (2) the lack of clarity regarding important details of proposed hatchery supplementation post-dam removal; (3) the lack of a sufficient adaptive management plan; (4) and the lack of clarity regarding who will make decisions and how those decisions will be made as the Fish Restoration Plan is implemented.

On this last point, it bears emphasis that transparency and accountability are essential to assuring the general public and all stakeholders that the enormous public investment in the Elwha restoration project is being well spent. Among the organizations signing this letter there may be diversity of opinion regarding some details of the Fish Restoration Plan, but on the need for a well structured, transparent decision-making process there is strong consensus.

Our concern regarding these shortcomings emanates from our strong belief – which is reflected in your stated priorities -- that fish restoration efforts be planned and conducted in a way that maximizes the opportunity for native fish to recolonize and re-establish healthy populations in the absence of factors within our control that could undermine that goal. It also emanates from the fact that the Elwha restoration project, if done well, would provide highly valuable new information that could inform salmon and steelhead management and recovery efforts throughout the West Coast, and could lead to a much more strategic and cost-effective use of limited funds.

In closing, we want to emphasize our support for the Elwha restoration project. This project provides an incredibly rare – perhaps the only -- opportunity in the continental United States to allow native salmon and steelhead to recolonize a large, highly functional watershed and establish healthy, locally adapted populations that fully utilize habitat and maximize their intrinsic productive potential. Once established, such populations would enable consistent, sustainable fishing opportunities for both tribal and non-tribal fishers for generations to come, as well as allow the Elwha’s anadromous fish to fill their ecological niche in the Elwha Basin.

We also want to acknowledge all of the hard work that the Lower Elwha Tribe and the federal and state agencies have done to bring this project to fruition. As you know, some of our organizations also have been instrumental in making this project a reality, first by advocating and building public support for dam removal, and then by helping to secure the funding required to remove the dams and undertake this massive restoration project.

It is with a continued spirit of partnership and cooperation that we request this meeting, and we appreciate your prompt consideration. To streamline communications, please contact Rob Masonis at Trout Unlimited, rmasonis@tu.org, (206) 491-9016, with your response and suggestions for a convenient time and place to meet, preferably in May.

Sincerely,



for:

Will Atlas – Co-Chair, Federation of Fly Fishers, Steelhead Committee



Kurt Beardslee – Executive Director, Wild Fish Conservancy



Bryan Irwin - Regional Executive Director, Coastal Conservation Association



John Kober – Executive Director, Pacific Rivers Council



Rob Masonis – Vice-President for Western Conservation, Trout Unlimited



Guido Rahr – President & Chief Executive, Wild Salmon Center



for:

Doug Schaad & Preston Singletary - Co-Chairs Conservation Committee, Washington Fly Fishing Club

RICHARD K. SIMMS

Rich Simms – President, Wild Steelhead Coalition

Prila Lidag

for:

Peter Soverel - President, The Conservation Angler

Brett Swift

Brett Swift – Northwest Regional Director, American Rivers