



League of Women Voters of Idaho
PO Box 9535
Moscow ID 83843-9535

March 11, 2018

Dear Mr. Reichert and Mr. Tucker,

The Columbia River is one of the most remarkable rivers on earth, drawing water from an area about the size of France. In the early 1800s when explorers Lewis and Clark, and David Thompson first stepped into the watershed, they found a river of life; 16 – 40 million salmon returned each year to natal streams in this Basin’s forests and deserts, renewing a great cycle of life. This was a place where indigenous people lived as they had from time immemorial, depending on salmon and the river. In two centuries, profound changes have occurred in the Columbia River Basin. Among those changes: dams, transforming one of the earth’s richest salmon rivers into the largest integrated hydropower system on earth. Benefits have come with wrenching costs to people, fish and wildlife, and the river.

In 1964, Canada and the United States ratified the Columbia River Treaty. Negotiators for both nations failed to consult with indigenous people, and indeed the people of the Basin generally. The Treaty contains only two purposes: hydropower and flood control. New dams built pursuant to the Columbia River Treaty forced thousands of people from their homes, permanently flooding vast areas in both the United States and Canada, and destroying habitat for wildlife and fish. Many of the Treaty’s benefits are exported outside the Basin in the form of hydropower.

In 2024, the current Treaty will flip flood-risk management responsibilities from Canadian reservoirs to dams and reservoirs on the United States side of the Basin. That looming change has encouraged both nations to revisit the Treaty. In 2013 the U.S. convened a Treaty Review that resulted in a recommendation that ecosystem-based function be added as a purpose in a modernized Treaty (<https://www.crt2014-2024review.gov/UsEntity.aspx>).

Fifteen Tribes of the Columbia Basin and conservation organizations joined efforts to bring about badly needed Treaty reforms. Out of this effort the American Treaty Caucus and the Canadian Treaty Caucus emerged, working together through the Columbia River Treaty Round Table. Participants in the Round Table include Back Country Hunters and Anglers, Sierra Club of Idaho, the Center for Environmental Policy and Law, Save Our Wild Salmon, and the League of Women Voters of Idaho (<http://www.celp.org/columbia-river-treaty-round-table/>). The Round Table first convened in Nelson, British Columbia, in November 2013 and has since continued a coordinating and networking function. Participants in the Round Table support adding ecosystem function, in addition to hydropower and flood-risk management, to the Treaty in 2024. The Round Table regularly invites representatives from the Columbia Basin tribes and First Nations to provide information and insight on the challenges facing citizens as we seek to modernize the Treaty.

The League of Women Voters of Idaho respectfully requests that Idaho Public Television consider presentation of a program to provide the public with information concerning the history of this important Treaty and the current efforts to support needed changes to the Treaty. Please contact Pat Ford, former Executive Director of the Save Our Wild Salmon Coalition at 208.345-9067 / PFord@idahoconservation.org, or Dr. John Osborn at John@waterplanet.ws / 509.939-1290 for additional information concerning the Columbia River Treaty Round Table, resources and contacts. The League also encourages you to contact representatives of the appropriate Idaho Indian Tribes (e.g., the Nez Perce Tribe) for this program.

Sincerely,
Susan Ripley
President of the League of Women Voters of Idaho