



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Washington Catholic Bishops Call for Plan to Care for Creation and the Common Good
in the Lower Snake River Region**

November 3, 2022 SEATTLE, WA – The [Washington State Catholic Conference](#), comprised of the five Catholic Bishops of Washington state, released a statement that calls for policy makers to develop and implement a holistic plan to care for creation and the common good in the Lower Snake River region.

The decline of salmon in the Lower Snake River points to the need to care for our common home. The bishops acknowledge that the diminishing salmon population in the Lower Snake River and the loss of their original habitat pose a threat to the spiritual lifeways of the Original People of the Northwest.

Echoing Pope Francis, who stated in *Laudato Si'* that Indigenous communities should be “principal dialogue partners” in large projects affecting their land, the bishops state that the Original Peoples of Washington state should be “principal dialogue partners” in forming a comprehensive plan for the Lower Snake River region. This plan should serve the common good, care for creation, and take into account the treaties and rights of the Original Peoples of Washington state and those who live and work in the Lower Snake River region.

On October 30, 2022, Archbishop Paul D. Etienne read the statement at the International Indigenous Salmon Seas Symposium in Seattle, WA. The statement was presented to Jay Julius of the Lummi Nation and JoDe Goudy of the Yakama Nation, leaders of the Indigenous nonprofit, [Se'Si'Le](#).

The full statement is below and may also be accessed at wacatholics.org.

Caring for Creation and the Common Good in the Lower Snake River Region

Saint Francis, faithful to Scripture, invites us to see nature as a magnificent book in which God speaks to us and grants us a glimpse of his infinite beauty and goodness. "Through the greatness and the beauty of creatures one comes to know by analogy their maker" (Wis 13:5); indeed, "his eternal power and divinity have been made known through his works since the creation of the world" (Rom 1:20). (12)

The urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable integral development, for we know that things can change . . . Humanity still has the ability to work together in building our common home. (13)

Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*

Pope Francis reminds us that through the greatness of creation we can become closer to God. Additionally, we are all called to be stewards of God's creation and to come together to care for our common home. Collaboration on innovative, holistic, and sustainable solutions is a timely, moral imperative that Catholics around the world are addressing through the [Laudato Si' Action Platform](#).

In the Lower Snake River region, we are also called to come together to care for our common home. A serious decline in salmon, a keystone species, is an indicator of environmental damage. Southern Resident orcas are also increasingly endangered as their food source diminishes. In response, we urge federal and state policymakers to care for creation, address the loss of biodiversity, and ensure the Lower Snake River ecosystem and its neighboring communities are able to thrive.

A comprehensive plan developed with the input of affected communities is needed to address the health of the Lower Snake River and the decline of species in the region. In taking action to care for God's creation, we urge policy makers to respect the dignity of every human person and serve the common good, two important pillars of the teachings of the Catholic Church.


In respecting the dignity of every human person, we first consider the Original Peoples of Washington state. Native American tribes of the region have a long-standing relationship of care and respect for the salmon of the Lower Snake River. We acknowledge that the decline of salmon and loss of their original habitat poses a threat to the spiritual lifeways of the Original Peoples of the Northwest. In response to requests for solidarity with Indigenous leaders, we recognize that deliberate action is necessary to find ways to restore the health of the salmon of the region.

Pope Francis emphasizes the importance of consulting with Indigenous peoples and highlights the sacred relationship many Native communities have with the environment in *Laudato Si'*:


. . . it is essential to show special care for Indigenous communities and their cultural traditions. They are not merely one minority among others, but should be the principal dialogue partners, especially when large projects affecting their land are proposed. For them, land is not a commodity but rather a gift from God and from their ancestors who rest there, a sacred space with which they need to interact if they are to maintain their identity and values. (145-146)

We must all come together to care for our common home. We urge federal and state policy makers to develop and implement a holistic plan for the Lower Snake River region that seeks input from the Original Peoples of Washington state as principal dialogue partners, as well as input from farmers, community members, and concerned citizens. Any policy changes should carefully consider those who may be negatively impacted. Ultimately, we pray for a plan that serves the common good, taking into account care for God's creation, treaties and rights of the Original Peoples of Washington state, and those who live and work in the Lower Snake River region.


In the heart of Christ,



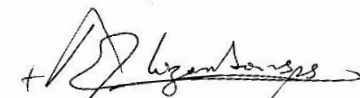
Most Rev. Paul D. Etienne
Archbishop of Seattle




Most Rev. Joseph J. Tyson
Bishop of Yakima



Most Rev. Thomas A. Daly
Bishop of Spokane



Most Rev. Eusebio Elizondo, M.Sp.S.
Auxiliary Bishop of Seattle



Most Rev. Frank Schuster
Auxiliary Bishop of Seattle

About the Washington State Catholic Conference

The Washington State Catholic Conference (WSCC) is the public policy voice of the five bishops of Washington state. The WSCC is comprised of Archbishop Paul Etienne of the Archdiocese of Seattle, Bishop Joseph Tyson of the Diocese of Yakima, Bishop Thomas Daly of the Diocese of Spokane, and Bishop Eusebio Elizondo and Bishop Frank Schuster, auxiliary bishops of the Archdiocese of Washington. For more information about the WSCC, please visit wacatholics.org.

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