



October 15, 2020

The Honorable David Bernhardt
Secretary of the Interior
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20240

Interior Solicitor Opinion M-37034

Dear Mr. Secretary Bernhardt,

Our organizations support the efforts of the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) to restore recreational fishing access to the Skokomish River in Washington state. On October 3, 2019, WDFW requested *“that Solicitor Opinion M-37034 (Boundary of the Skokomish Reservation along the Skokomish River) be reversed, or at a minimum be withdrawn, based upon extensive new information and associated legal analyses.”*

We support this request and believe that WDFW has conducted a comprehensive and thorough review of all relevant facts. We hope this issue can be resolved in a manner that rightfully allows recreational anglers to access the Skokomish River. Freshwater salmon fishing opportunities are extremely limited in the Puget Sound area. The Skokomish River once provided critical bank angling opportunities to thousands of anglers annually, many of whom lack the boats and equipment necessary to participate in offshore salmon fisheries.

It is our understanding that your Department is currently in the process of reviewing Opinion M-37034. We remain optimistic that the Opinion will be reversed or withdrawn. As our annual salmon season setting process will begin soon, we respectfully ask that your Department expedite the review process and offer your decision by December 31, 2020. This will allow state and tribal fisheries managers adequate time to negotiate and plan for a 2021 salmon season on the Skokomish River. Knowing that anglers will again return to the Skokomish River in 2021 would be welcome news to local businesses such as tackle stores, hotels and restaurants and would provide them with ample opportunity to plan ahead to maximize the economic benefits of a favorable decision.

On behalf of our respective organizations, we appreciate the time and effort that the Department of the Interior has already invested in a review of the M-37034 Opinion. We remain hopeful that, after the Department of the Interior concludes its comprehensive review, the public will once again have the opportunity to fish on the productive salmon waters of the Skokomish River.

Thank you,

Chris Horton
Senior Director, Fisheries Policy
Congressional Sportsmen’s Foundation

Nello Picinich
Executive Director
Coastal Conservation Association Washington