



## Winnemem Wintu Tribe

14840 Bear Mountain Rd  
Redding, CA 96003

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March 15, 2021

Secretary Deb Haaland  
Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street, N.W.  
Washington DC 20240

Re: **Imminent Threat to the Culture of our People with the Enlargement of Shasta Dam  
- Justice for the Winnemem Wintu Tribe**

Dear Secretary Haaland,

Congratulations on your historic confirmation as the first Native American to serve as Interior Secretary. We look forward to working with you to begin to bring justice to the Winnemem Wintu people.

As we stood in unity at Standing Rock to protect the sacred, we must now stand in unity to protect a People, their river, their culture, and their sacred relatives, the salmon.

I am the spiritual leader of the Winnemem Wintu Tribe. I am writing on behalf of my people, the Winnemem Wintu, to ask for your help, once you are confirmed as the Secretary of the Interior. You can help reverse more than 80 years of harm to our people, caused by the Bureau of Reclamation's construction of Shasta Dam. To the Winnemem Wintu people, Shasta Dam has been a weapon of mass destruction. Yet today, the Bureau of Reclamation is still working to raise the height of the dam, which would further harm our people.

My people, the Winnemem Wintu, are not currently on the list of federally recognized Tribes. It is something we have been trying to get resolved for many years. As you will see by this letter, and the information accompanying it, the Tribe's failure to be included on the list of recognized tribes is in large part due to the Bureau of Reclamation's failure to place a cemetery into trust in the name of the Tribe as specifically required by law—along with our intense, decades-long, opposition to Shasta Dam.

We request the following actions by the federal government:

- Permanently stop the proposed raise of Shasta Dam.
- Withdraw the Trump administration's extinction plan for our salmon – i.e., the re-write of the 2019 NMFS Draft Biological Opinion for the new long term Operating Criteria and



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Plan (OCAP) for joint operation of the Central Valley Project and State Water Project in California.

- Fulfill the requirements of 55 Stat 612 (Central Valley Project Indian Lands Acquisition Act) which allowed the construction of Shasta Dam in the 1940s. This would have provided my people with compensation, land, and assets held in trust for the Tribe.

Tribes across the nation have suffered at the hands of the federal government. In our case, much of the damage over the past 80 years has been caused by the Department of the Interior, specifically the Bureau of Reclamation. We ask for your leadership to reverse some of that damage.

The Winnemem Wintu name means “middle water people” – a reference to the McCloud River. This river and its salmon define our identify. Yet, because of Shasta Dam, the winter-run Chinook salmon – our salmon – is on the verge of extinction. The fate of the river and its salmon is our fate. We believe that if the salmon are gone, soon there will be no people. The history of the tribe, our river and our salmon are explained in the attached documents.

The construction of Shasta Dam caused our people to suffer the loss of our land and spiritual sites, the loss of our communities and our traditional economy, and an enormous decline in our tribal population. It also prevented winter-run Chinook salmon from reaching the McCloud River to spawn, causing further damage.

Congress knew that the construction of Shasta Dam would cause impacts to our people. That is why, in 1941, Congress passed the Central Valley Project Indian Lands Acquisition Act. However, 80 years later, the federal government has failed to implement the many requirement of the Act, specifically regarding land, compensation and holding our relocated tribal cemetery in trust for the tribe. It is time to implement these requirements.

Despite the fact that our people were never properly compensated, Shasta Dam was constructed. Today, the Bureau of Reclamation is planning to raise the height of Shasta Dam by 18.5 feet, flooding additional sites that are sacred to our people. In addition, federal biologists have found that the project would further harm our salmon. Given the ESA listed status of the winter-run Chinook species, the dam project could cause its extinction.

State law prohibits the raising of Shasta Dam. Governor Gavin Newsom opposes the project. And state law prohibits any state water agency from financing the dam raise. This dam is immoral, infeasible and illegal. Yet the past administration made it their top water infrastructure



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priority in the nation, in part because your predecessor was for years a lobbyist for the Westlands Water District. We urge you to stop this project permanently.

The Trump Administration also threatened our people with additional damage when they issued a new biological opinion (BO) in 2020, addressing the impacts of Shasta Dam and the Central Valley Project on the winter-run, as well as spring-run Chinook, Central Valley steelhead, green sturgeon and southern resident orca whale. This new document weakened every important ESA protection in the previous BO for a species that was already on the brink of extinction. In particular, the new Trump BO weakens temperature protections for salmon below Shasta Dam, eliminates a requirement regarding the reintroduction of salmon to the McCloud River, and weakens protections for migrating salmon in the Delta. This biological opinion represents an extinction plan for our salmon. We urge you to withdraw the similar flawed biological opinion issued by the US Fish and Wildlife Service and to work with NOAA to withdraw the related Trump-era salmon biological opinion.

The protection of our salmon and the restoration of salmon to our river can provide enormous benefits for our people – cultural and spiritual benefits, as well as health and economic benefits. As a Native American and an activist for native rights, you know the harm that the federal government has inflicted on native people. In this case, it is within your power as Secretary, indeed, it is your legal obligation under the 1941 Act and other federal laws, to begin to reverse that damage.

Thank you for considering these requests. Finally, we request a meeting with you in California or in Washington D.C. to discuss these important issues.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Caleen Sisk  
Spiritual Leader  
Winnemem Wintu Tribe

Attachments:  
History of the Winnemem Wintu Tribe  
OnEarth Magazine article, 600 Feet and Rising