



February 24, 2025

The Honorable Members of the Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington State Congressional Delegations  
United States Senate & United States House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C.

Dear Pacific NW Members of Congress:

On behalf of the Pacific Northwest Waterways Association (PNWA), I write to express our strong opposition to federal employee cuts being implemented by the “Department of Government Efficiency” (DOGE). Specifically, the intention to fire thousands of U.S. Army Corps of Engineers’ (USACE) critical employees, who are vital to the safety, efficiency, and economic vitality of the entire region. These USACE employees are experts who are essential in maintaining and operating our waterway infrastructure safely – protecting the millions of people who rely on its benefits including navigation, hydropower, irrigation, and flood control.

PNWA has over 150 members, including ports, barge companies, steamship operators, grain elevator operators, agricultural producers, electric utilities, irrigation districts, cruise lines, and union labor throughout Oregon, Washington, and Idaho. Our association supports projects to advance and protect the region’s navigation infrastructure, freight mobility, economic health, and the environment. We advocate for federal funding, policies, and projects that benefit our membership and the region – supporting federal agencies like USACE in their ability to perform critical life safety and economic functions.

DOGE intends to fire over 2,000 USACE employees nationwide who are on “probationary status” (hired in a role for less than a year, and in some cases 2 years). We are told that well-over 600 of those employees are located in the Northwestern Division (NWD), which is headquartered in Portland, OR and oversees 5 districts (Portland, Seattle, Walla Walla, Omaha, and Kansas City). The vast majority of USACE NWD employees are associated with the Seattle, Portland, and Walla Walla Districts. Several thousand additional employees have elected to take the Deferred Resignation Plan (DRP) and will be placed on paid leave beginning March 1<sup>st</sup>.

USACE is unlike any other federal agency – they recruit, train, and retain the nation’s best engineers, program managers, operators, maintainers, environmental scientists, conservationists and more. It can take years, and sometimes decades, for a USACE employee to gain the experience necessary to be successful in their field. Losing these employees will dramatically affect the Corps’ ability to execute their mission safely and effectively. Just two weeks from now, USACE is planning a lock-outage to conduct major maintenance on the majority of dams and navigation locks on the Columbia-Snake River system. This well-coordinated and planned effort costs tens of millions of dollars and is absolutely critical to ensure the Congressionally-authorized federal navigation channel remains a vital supply chain link to our nation. In 2022, 49.7 million metric tons moved on the Columbia-Snake River system and supported over \$31.2B in commodity and cargo value.

The Lower Columbia River channel is maintained by the USACE at an authorized depth of 43 feet. Dredging is completed nearly year-round by the Corps with several different vessels – it is an efficient and environmentally-friendly process that the Corps manages expertly despite hundreds of variables. The channel (which supports nearly 1,500 vessel movements a year, and over 140,000 jobs) is a critical link in the supply chain and economy of our region. Just a one-foot reduction in the channel depth could result in over \$1 million per vessel of lost cargo capacity. The Columbia-Snake River system is the nation’s number one wheat export gateway. It is absolutely critical this supply chain link remain open and unrestricted, if not, it jeopardizes the thousands of farmers across the country who rely on it – this is a national issue of extreme importance. Billions of dollars in economic impact are at stake if we do not ensure our partners at USACE have the resources and people they need to carry out this important mission.

PNWA strongly urges that the federal firing of USACE employees, and other federal employees critical to the safety and operation of a wide range of infrastructure in our region, be halted immediately. We are deeply concerned that this process will negatively impact the safe operations and maintenance of normal U.S. Army Corps functions; hydropower generation, flood control, navigation, irrigation, recreation, and more. Millions of Pacific NW residents are at risk due to this shortsighted approach. USACE employees are not just another cog in the wheel of unnecessary bureaucracy, they are the experts our nation relies on to ensure our federal infrastructure is safe, productive, efficient, and predictable –our USACE partners need help. The USACE facilitates economic trade and growth –losing key people today will have an adverse effect on the safety and efficiency of this system and all who rely on it for decades.

Sincerely,



Neil Maunu  
Executive Director  
Pacific Northwest Waterways Association

CC: Elon Musk, Director DOGE  
President Donald J Trump