



U.S. SENATOR MARIA CANTWELL WASHINGTON

Cantwell Leadership on the Columbia River Treaty

Senator Cantwell has been a leading advocate for modernizing the Columbia River Treaty, pressing three different Presidential Administrations and the Canadian Government to negotiate revisions that rebalance and optimize Treaty provisions to the benefit of Washingtonians.

Treaty Background:

[January 17, 1961](#): The Columbia River Treaty was signed by President Dwight Eisenhower and Canadian Prime Minister John Diefenbaker.

[December 13, 2013](#): The [Regional Recommendation](#) for the future of the Columbia River Treaty, based on consultations with stakeholders, states, and tribes, was sent by the U.S. Entity (consisting of the Chairman of the BPA and the Northwestern Division Engineer of the Army Corps of Engineers) to the Department of State.

Timeline of Sen. Cantwell's Actions:

[April 14, 2014](#): Senator Cantwell joins bipartisan letter urging Obama Administration to make Treaty consideration a priority.

[June 16, 2015](#): Senator Cantwell asks Mr. Jonathan Elkind, the Obama Administration's nominee to serve as the Energy Department's Assistant Secretary for International Affairs, if he will focus on moving the administration forward on Columbia River Treaty negotiations.

[March 10, 2016](#): Senator Cantwell secured a commitment from Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to take steps towards modernizing the Columbia River Treaty. This followed a letter sent by the Senator urging the Prime Minister to appoint a Canadian negotiating team, which he committed to do following in-person discussions with Cantwell.

[June 23, 2016](#): Senator Cantwell met with Canadian Ambassador David MacNaughton to discuss the Columbia River Treaty.

August 11, 2016: Senator Cantwell led a [letter](#) to Secretary John Kerry, urging him to speed up the State Department's progress towards approving negotiations to modernize the treaty. The letter was signed by 21 other Pacific Northwest members of Congress.

October 7, 2016: Senator Cantwell spoke with Secretary Kerry after the State Department officially authorized talks with Canada to modernize the treaty.

May 29-30, 2018: The United States and Canada began negotiations to modernize the [Columbia River Treaty](#). Since these initial discussions, there have been 15 rounds of negotiations between the two countries.

June 10, 2021: Senator Cantwell joined Senator Jim Risch (R-ID) in sending a [letter](#) to President Joe Biden expressing support for a successful and timely conclusion of Columbia River Treaty negotiations. The Senators specifically urged the President to designate a White House official or team to support the State Department and help coordinate efforts between all involved federal agencies.

November 15, 2021: President Biden signed the [Bipartisan Infrastructure Law](#) which contains Cantwell-authored provisions to encourage the modernization of the Columbia River Treaty. This includes major upgrades in the transmission capacity between the United States and Canada if more equitable entitlement payments to British Columbia are established. Moreover, it includes funds to study improved water and power flow coordination between the Pacific Northwest and British Columbia.

December 23, 2022: President Biden signed the Fiscal Year [2023 NDAA](#) into law, which contains key provisions secured by Senator Cantwell to help modernize the Columbia River Treaty. This includes directing the Army Corps of Engineers to study flood control in the Columbia River Basin, which will help evaluate improvements to flood control and water storage in the region.

March 22, 2023: Senator Cantwell led a [letter](#) to President Biden ahead of his trip to Canada, urging him to prioritize Columbia River Treaty negotiations during his time abroad. The letter was signed by the entire Pacific Northwest Congressional delegation, and noted the potential for volatility in the region if no agreement could be reached.

March 24, 2023: Following Senator Cantwell's letter, President Biden and Prime Minister Trudeau agreed to intensify talks on the Columbia River Treaty. The two heads of state released a [joint statement](#).

December 13, 2023: Senator Cantwell joined Sen. Risch to send a [letter](#) to President Biden and Prime Minister Trudeau, urging them to modernize and strengthen the Columbia River Treaty. The letter was sent exactly a decade after the U.S. Entity released the Regional Recommendation. Specifically, the senators called for an overhaul of flood risk management provisions, and a change in Canadian compensation mandated by the treaty.

July 11, 2024: Senator Cantwell announced the United States and Canada have reached an agreement in principle on a modernized Columbia River Treaty.