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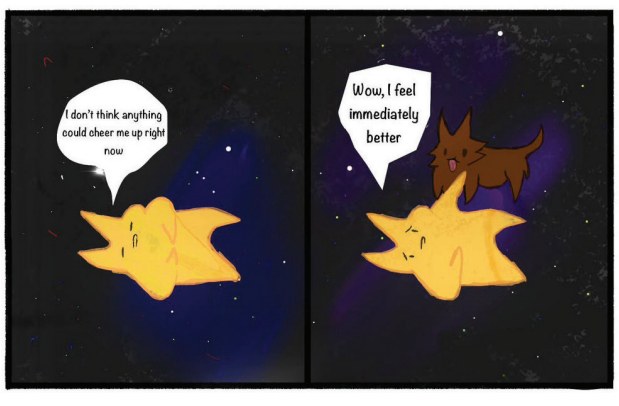
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Daily OPINION

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IN MEDIAS RES:

With the removal of dams, the return of kings



A bird's-eye view of the Klamath River. A dam in the river was decommissioned in an effort to improve environmental conditions. PHOTO COURTESY OF FLICKR

by Colin Hamilton
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Analogous to the archetypal American wilds, Chinook salmon, also known as king salmon, were driven to the edge of extinction in the Pacific Northwest in the 1990s because of a century's worth of environmental degradation at the hands of American expansionism. Increased runoff and erosion from anthropogenic activities had polluted their rivers; industrial construction had blocked their paths home; warming waters had robbed them of their freshwater food sources.

In the Klamath River, which flows for 260 miles between Oregon and California, these kings had all but disappeared. Yet in 2024, they began to return, thanks to conservation and rewilding efforts. A recently released study in Scientific Reports showed that the 2025 spawning season counted a migratory population of 13,000 Chinook salmon, a 72% increase from the 2024 season. More hope has been given by the success of springtime spawning — the study confirmed that after a century of depletion, the first juvenile Chinook were observed in the upper basin.

The secret of this unprecedented success has been the removal of the four Klamath River dams — the result of a nearly two decades' worth of advocacy, made famous through Patagonia's award-winning "DamNation" documentary. The removal of the dams in the region also coincided with a return of Indigenous food sources, an increase in water quality and a removal of toxic cyanobacterial blooms.

To many, the removal of a dam being considered an environmentally friendly initiative may come as a surprise. Hydropower has been ingrained in the popular imagination as a figurehead of green energy, which captures the power of rivers to generate electricity for vast swaths of our nation.

While dams may not burn fossil fuels, they are far from being "green" energy. By their nature, dams raise water levels, causing an immense buildup of sediment that can not only hinder energy generation, but can also slow the flow rate of rivers. The resulting slow-moving water traps heat and lacks oxygen. These stagnant reservoir pools also disorient fish during migration, disrupting their reproductive cycles. These conditions culminate into intense organic stress that can damage the health of aquatic species and can lead to die-offs.

Dams affect the physical environment of rivers as well. Trapped debris -- such as gravel, logs and other natural sediments — is prevented from traveling downstream, where it can form the complex riffles and pools needed to support healthy river systems. Also prevented from dissemination are the vital flow of nutrients like carbon, nitrogen, silicon and phosphorus which traditionally flow through the river system. Consequently, sedimentation build-up in reservoirs leads to increased nutrient retention upstream, leading to harmful eutrophication. Erosion can also increase downstream due to high water pressure released intermittently from dams, destroying local habitats and disintegrating riverbanks. This degradation can later lead to flooding and the destruction of surrounding forests, doing away with a vital carbon sink.

Dams are not without emissions either. Globally, dams contribute roughly 1.3% of the world's annual greenhouse gas emissions, as much as the entire nation of Canada. This is partially a result of methane release from trapped sediments. Dam infrastructure also wastes water — negating away with the argument that they are a necessary evil for global water consumption. As a result of the wider surface area, increased transpiration and slower flow rates of reservoirs, dams lose over 170 cubic kilometers of water to evaporation each year. This number is equivalent to around 7% of all freshwater consumed by human activities per year.

Critics of dam removal argue that the disposal of the infrastructure is hazardous to the environment and necessitates avoidance. This logic makes sense. Many dams were born out of an industrial past and as such have been severely contaminated with pollutants. Tailing dams in particular often have noxious sludge buildup as a result of chemical waste and runoff. Critics argue that removing dams would release these sediments outwards, polluting any areas downstream of the site.

This concern, though well founded, fails to account for the fact that dam breaches are already remarkably common. Roughly 70% of dams in the US are over a half century old and surpass their expected life expectancy by decades. As a result, system failures are becoming more common as our nation's infrastructure continues to age. Furthermore, toxic minerals have been shown to escape into the soil through acid draining and microbial consumption, thereby negating the utility of dam storage. By choosing to neglect the safe removal of these aging dams, an already hazardous situation is only exacerbated.

Globally, 97% of rivers have been impacted or fragmented because of dam infrastructure. The success of the Klamath River restoration project and the resulting return of the king salmon shows the clear benefits of removing these misguided feats of human ingenuity. Though the restorative process is still in its infancy, the projected long-term benefits provide a strong argument as to why our nation's aging dams must be removed. Policymakers must look towards the Klamath River as precedent for why our waterways must be saved.

Time for the world to recognize Kosovo!

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On Feb. 17th, 2008, the nation of Kosovo declared their independence from Serbia. Almost 20 years later, they find themselves without a seat at the United Nations, despite being recognized by over 100 UN member states. Even though United Nations Security Council resolution 1244 was adopted in 1999, removing Belgade's grasp over Kosovo's government, it seems that Serbia still keeps Kosovo under its thumb. Serbia and many of its allies, like Russia, form just enough of a minority to keep Kosovo from the UN. The world must end this minority holdout because Kosovo has fought, bled and died for its existence.

For a nation to be added to the UN, nine out of 15 Security Council members must recommend admission, then 129 from the general assembly must vote in favor of the nation. As the UN Security Council stands today, 11 of the 15 recognize Kosovo. Two permanent members do not — Russia and China. They can't block the recommended admission with a veto but can block bringing topics like Kosovo. The second problem arises with the general assembly, where only 110 nations recognized Kosovo, falling short of the 129 needed for two thirds. The 110 need to be doing more, like economic sanctions, to gain those holdouts.

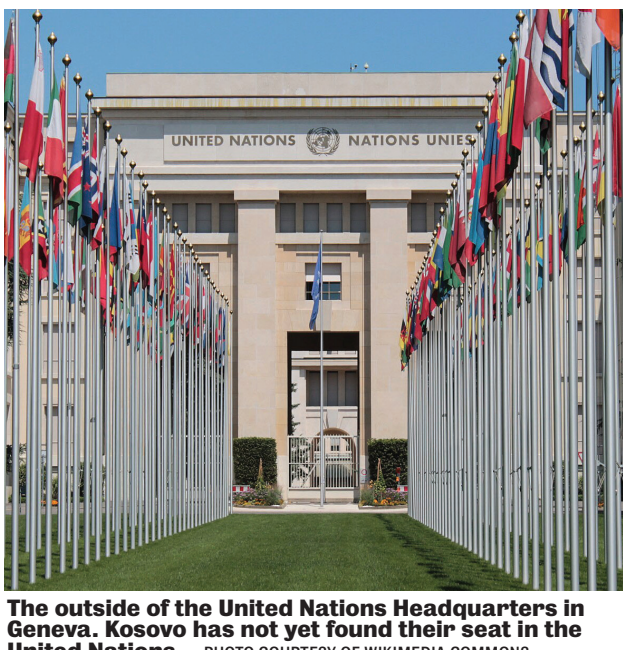
There needs to be a global push to recognize Kosovo. Nations like Spain and Greece, despite being in NATO and the EU, do not recognize Kosovo. NATO was heavily involved in the Kosovo war. To have two nations that were both members in 1999, even though Greece did not support the air campaign over Yugoslavia, not recognizing the country shows friction within NATO. This friction is not what NATO should present on the world stage.

Spain claims they won't recognize Kosovo because they fear that by recognizing Kosovo, they will be legitimizing separatist movements within their own borders. They fear Catalonia and Basque would push even harder to break away. However, Spain recognized South Sudan after they voted to become independent in 2011. The Spanish statements about recognition aren't as tied to the Catalonia question as they make it seem. Countries should no longer claim non-recognition over fears of domestic separatist movements.

We, as a people of the world, must squash the very notion that Serbia has any claim to Kosovo. They have had nothing but old, outdated maps since 1999. Belgrade must give in and see that Kosovo is not Serbia and will never be Serbia. Kosovo fought in 1999 to free itself from the collapsing Yugoslavia. It is time for Serbia to wake up and realize Yugoslavia is dead. The constant grasping at relics from the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia only hurts Serbia in the long run. Countries around them are getting with the times and moving past the old borders. Serbia can either do the same or collect dust on a shelf next to Yugoslavia.

We must fight for Kosovo and continue to fight until Belgrade yields. They yielded in 1999 and they will yield again. Kosovo will join the UN — it is not a matter of if, but when, and that "when" should not be delayed nor blocked. It should be embraced and celebrated as a nation and people being seen and heard. The US should be keen on pushing for Kosovo because of a long friendship.

As former President Bush said after Kosovo declared independence, "Kosovo committed itself to the highest standards of democracy, including freedom and tolerance and justice for citizens of all ethnic backgrounds. These are the principles that honor human dignity, they are the values America looks for in a friend."



The outside of the United Nations Headquarters in Geneva. Kosovo has not yet found their seat in the United Nations. PHOTO COURTESY OF WIKIMEDIA COMMONS