Northwest RIVERPARTNERS
Hydropower for a better Northwest

PRESS STATEMENT

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Vancouver, WA

Final Environmental Impact Statement Completes Four Year Federal Process; Settles Debate on the Value of the Lower Snake River Dams

Northwest RiverPartners Commends Thorough & Holistic EIS Process; Advocates Greater Efforts Around Climate to Support Salmon Recovery

Northwest RiverPartners today welcomed the much anticipated Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) released by federal action agencies as part of the Columbia River System Operations (CRSO) process.

Developed by the US Army Corps of Engineers, the Bonneville Power Administration, and the US Bureau of Reclamation, with input from tribal nations and Northwest states, the FEIS provides a comprehensive, final analysis of the four lower Snake River dams (LSRD). It balances the needs of salmon, power supply, and social welfare in the Pacific Northwest.

The report concluded that the best option for fulfilling the multiple objectives of improving salmonid survival, providing a reliable electric grid, and reaching the Northwest's clean energy future is to maintain the four LSRD with adjusted operations.

Importantly, the FEIS acknowledges the role of the LSRD as a critical source of affordable and dependable energy for the Northwest and reiterates that without the LSRD, the Northwest would be much more susceptible to energy shortages and regional blackouts.

The socio-economic consequences to communities of losing the LSRD would have been dire. The FEIS estimates that the cost of replacing the LSRD with other renewable energy sources backed up with batteries would have approached $800 million *per year.* That roughly equates to a 25% increase in electricity bills for millions of Northwest residents and businesses.

Exorbitant electricity bills would create economic chaos at a time when we are already reeling from a global pandemic, a homelessness crisis, and an affordable housing shortage.

Achieving a sustainable future requires that we embrace the needs of all communities, and, in particular, the escalating plight of our most vulnerable; Native American tribes, communities of color, immigrant communities, and low-income families.

The report is clear that the potential benefit to salmon from dam breaching varies widely according to modeling assumptions, but the harm to communities that rely on hydropower would have been devastating.

Salmon a Major FEIS Focus

Salmon and steelhead recovery is a critical area of focus in the FEIS. In particular, there has been much debate about the importance of increased spill levels at dams for salmonid survival.

Many salmon advocates believe spilling water with juvenile salmonids over the dams' spillways—rather than allowing smolts to go through fish bypass systems or past turbines—is beneficial for the salmon and steelhead life cycle. Others argue that higher spill could induce gas bubble trauma in juveniles and increase up-river migration for adults.

The FEIS has adopted an operation that invests millions of dollars annually to test whether increased spill will help or hinder salmonids. The new operation incorporates dramatically higher levels of spill than ever before as part of season-long hydroelectric operations. This operation is part of the continuation of the Flexible Spill Agreement arrived at by Northwest states and many tribal nations in 2018 and put into action in 2019.

The FEIS also calls for continued significant investments in habitat restoration as part of a holistic approach to helping salmonids.

Biological Opinion

Today's EIS release coincides with the release of a NOAA Fisheries' Biological Opinion, which examined the proposed hydroelectric operations under the EIS Preferred Alternative. It found that the recommended operations are consistent with the requirements of the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

While past Biological Opinions have been found by the federal court to be inconsistent with the requirements of the ESA, it is our belief that the great lengths taken by the federal agencies to examine dam breaching and other options will demonstrate to the court that the federal action agencies have presented a thoughtful plan, which is consistent with salmon and steelhead recovery objectives.

NWRP espouses hydropower as an important source of affordable, clean energy for the Northwest and embraces the critical need to protect our salmon. We welcome the findings presented in the FEIS and the Biological Opinion. We have always believed that salmon and dams can coexist.

Climate Change & Salmon
We are deeply aware of the need to find strong solutions for the plight of our salmon—a tenet profoundly acknowledged in the EIS.

Given the near-synchronous decline in worldwide salmon populations, addressing climate change and deteriorating oceans are necessary steps for salmon recovery.

NOAA Fisheries' analysis from the Biological Opinion shows that ocean warming and acidification due to climate change represent a significant and growing threat to healthy salmonid populations. Breaching the lower Snake River dams, conversely, would almost certainly increase the region's carbon footprint and contribute to further harmful ocean changes.

To meet salmon recovery efforts, we advocate a more reasonable approach through a continued push towards decarbonization to help reverse the worldwide trend in declining salmon runs.

Thorough, Collaborative Process
We hope the Environmental Impact Statement and its in-depth decision-making process bring closure for all stakeholders involved and a firmer conviction around the critical role of the hydropower system, which provides the Northwest with the most affordable carbon-free, renewable energy in the nation.

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About Northwest RiverPartners
Northwest RiverPartners (NWRP) is a not-for-profit, member-driven organization. We represent not-for-profit, community-owned utilities across Washington,

Oregon, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, and Nevada. We also proudly represent farmers, ports, and businesses across the region that support clean energy and low-carbon transportation.

NWRP is focused on raising awareness about how the Northwest's hydropower system betters communities and the natural environment, and we encourage science-based solutions that help hydropower and salmon coexist and thrive. http://nwriverpartners.org