

## **Energy Debate Overlooks Profound Threat to Vulnerable Northwest Communities**

### *Loss of Carbon-free Hydropower Would Create a Two-Class Social Equity System*

**Vancouver, WA, November 25, 2019** – Northwest RiverPartners, a not-for-profit, member-driven organization that advocates for carbon-free hydropower, today issued a warning about the dire impact that dam removal and the associated threat to hydroelectricity would have on the most vulnerable communities in the Northwest.

“On an annual basis, fifty percent of the Northwest region’s electricity generation comes from carbon-free hydropower,” said Kurt Miller, executive director of Northwest RiverPartners. “Loss of this critical resource would lead to blackouts and capacity shortages, disproportionately burdening susceptible communities.”

Northwest RiverPartners isn’t alone in their concern about the future of electricity in the region. In an unprecedented move, hundreds of Northwest energy leaders [convened](#) this October to address the real threat to future power resources and supply, in part due to increased efforts to diminish the hydroelectric system. These efforts come at a time when thousands of megawatts of carbon-emitting resources are already being removed without an immediate replacement.

Yet many involved in the debate have overlooked the critical sociological and economic aspect that would adversely impact low income communities and communities of color.

“There is a very important social justice component of our work that embraces environmental equity issues and prioritizes a renewable energy future that doesn’t leave people behind,” said Miller. “We advocate for hydroelectricity because it is clean, affordable, and accessible for all communities - it is a critical part of the Northwest’s clean energy future.”

Many Northwest communities with the highest percentage of low-income and disadvantaged populations and communities of color, rely on hydroelectricity as a cost-effective carbon-free energy resource. Many also rely on dams, and the benefits they provide, for jobs.

For example, the Tri-Cities region in Washington state has a growing population of almost 300,000 of which over one third are communities of color according to the [U.S. Census Bureau](#). A high proportion of workers within this community are employed by or tied to the agricultural industry, which in turn relies on the irrigation made possible by area dams.

As evidenced by the current California power outages, which have shown a disturbing economic divide, the price of installing alternative energy systems is still cost-prohibitive to more vulnerable segments of the population.

“While it's important that we focus on a clean energy future, our current trajectory is leading to a two-class system for electricity where only the well-to-do can afford new energy sources such as solar panels, inverters, batteries and backup generation,” continued Miller.

A threat to carbon-free hydropower would also affect small businesses in the region. Solar and wind power, which are balanced by the stability and reliability of hydropower, are becoming more affordable. Still, the least expensive way to participate in the clean energy future and maintain the cheapest power bills in the country is through the use of hydroelectricity.

“At our meetings, we’ve often said that you cannot have sustainability without equity,” said Sam Brooks, founder and board chairman, Oregon Association of Minority Entrepreneurs. “Our minority, women-owned, and emerging small businesses need continued access to clean and affordable energy resources like hydroelectricity.”

The debate over the value and role of hydropower and the prospect of dam removal in the Northwest has been gaining traction and will reach a pivotal point next February with the release of the [Draft Columbia River System Operations Environmental Impact Statement](#) by federal action agencies. The report will analyze the societal, environmental, and economic costs and benefits of breaching the four lower Snake River dams.

### **About Northwest RiverPartners**

Northwest RiverPartners is a not-for-profit, member-driven organization. Members include community-owned utilities, ports, and businesses from across the northwestern United States. The organization is focused on raising awareness about how the Northwest’s hydropower system betters communities and the natural environment and encourages science-based solutions that help hydropower and salmon coexist and thrive. <http://nwriverpartners.org>

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