



Statement from NWRP in Response to Governor Inslee’s Final Draft Report on the Lower Snake River Dams

Report Shows Complexities, Dangers of Dam Breaching

Vancouver, WA, March 13, 2020—The [final draft](#) report on Washington state’s Lower Snake River Dams Stakeholder Process has been released, revealing wide-ranging issues and contentious opinions about the importance of the four lower Snake River dams (LSRD) as part of the region’s clean energy future.

Regarding the LSRD, Governor Inslee’s report stated, "They have boosted the economy and local communities in Southeast Washington but have also harmed tribal and fishing communities throughout the Pacific Northwest."

We appreciate the different perspectives that were shared in the Governor’s report. We would respectfully add that the lower Snake River dams have done more than boost “local communities” in Southeast Washington.

The Northwest Power Pool and other regional energy forecasters agree that the Northwest is headed for a potential energy shortage or even region-wide blackouts over the next 1 to 5 years. This risk is driven by the accelerated retirement of approximately 7,000 megawatts of coal-fueled power plants in the Northwest over the next decade. (1,000 average megawatts of electricity is enough to power a city the size of Seattle.)

The Draft Environmental Impact Statement predicts that this heightened risk of region-wide blackouts would *double* if the LSRD were lost. It also shows that replacing the carbon-free attributes of the LSRD would cost \$1 billion *annually* and result in a 25% increase in electricity bills for millions of customers across the Northwest.

Replacing the dams with natural gas-fueled power plants would cost much less, but would increase the power grid’s carbon footprint by approximately 10% or 3 million metric tons a year. We now live in a carbon-constrained world, where this type of outcome is not acceptable.

For these and many other reasons, it is clear that the lower Snake River dams are critical to the entire Northwest.

We do agree with the report’s conclusion that there are “opportunities for greater understanding.” In our own experience, we have many shared common interests with stakeholders on both sides of the LSRD debate.

These interests include improving salmon populations, providing clean, affordable energy to the region, and improving the lives of people in the Northwest. We continue to have important conversations with various stakeholder groups and are always looking for opportunities to find beneficial solutions.

We greatly appreciate Gov. Inslee’s leadership in fighting the climate crisis and welcome further opportunities to collaborate with regional stakeholders. Our goal is to reach a consensus on the best ways to achieve a clean and equitable energy future while improving conditions for salmon and Southern Resident orcas.

The final draft report from the Washington stakeholder process is valuable in that it reflects many state-wide perspectives, but we must remember that it did not fact-check or validate the claims and opinions of those interviewed. It is important to frame the findings of the report within that context.

The governing process for reviewing the operation of the federally-owned dams is the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process, which is currently underway. Governor Inslee plans to submit his report as part of the public comment period on the NEPA process, which runs through April 13, 2020.

The key body of work in the NEPA process is the [Columbia River System Operations Draft Environmental Impact Statement](#) released on February 28, 2020. With thousands of pages of analysis and scientific study, it represents four years of input from federal agencies, Native American tribes, and the states of Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and Montana.

The DEIS clearly demonstrated that the environmental and societal costs of dam breaching continue to outweigh the theoretical and potentially modest benefits to salmon in the Snake River.

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About Northwest RiverPartners

Northwest RiverPartners (NWRP) is a not-for-profit, member-driven organization. We serve not-for-profit, community-owned utilities in the Northwest. We also proudly represent regional ports and businesses. NWRP 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>