PRESS RELEASE

July 12, 2022
Vancouver, WA

Biden Administration's BPA Study Confirms: Breaching Dams Would Cost Billions, Slow Fight Against Climate Change

BPA Study: Dam Removal Gambles $75 Billion on Emerging Technologies

NOAA "Review Draft" Concedes: Dam Removal Doesn't Guarantee More Salmon

Vancouver, Washington—July 12, 2022—The Biden Administration released two documents today regarding the Lower Snake River dams (LSRD). One is an analysis performed on behalf of the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) by E3 that explores cost and environmental impacts in maintaining grid reliability across multiple scenarios in the event of the removal of the clean, low-cost electricity produced by the lower Snake River dams (LSRD). The other is a "Review Draft" released by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) with contributions from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Nez Perce Tribe, and State of Oregon that advocates actions they support to create a "harvestable" amount of fish.

The study conducted by E3 verifies previous analyses and conclusions by Northwest RiverPartners including the recently released study by Energy GPS (press release is here). The E3 and Energy GPS studies demonstrate that, given existing technologies, there is currently no viable way to remove the LSRD without burning more fossil fuels or jeopardizing grid reliability.

"According to the report commissioned by the Biden Administration's BPA Snake River dam removal would force ratepayers to gamble $75B or an increase in carbon emissions against technology that is not yet available. We all want emerging technologies to be viable, but we cannot bet our climate and the health and safety of our region on something that doesn't yet exist," said Kurt Miller, executive director, Northwest RiverPartners.

“Ratepayers’ bills go up if the dams are breached. The study commissioned by the Biden Administration BPA says to expect up to a 65% increase in electricity rates if the LSRD are removed while the region pursues electrification policies. A future without the LSRD means billions of dollars in costs for millions of electricity customers across the Northwest,” Miller continued. “The study confirms the fact these dams are irreplaceable for the region if we want to meet our emissions reduction objectives and maintain a reliable grid at an affordable cost.”

The BPA-commissioned analysis looked at four scenarios of managing the power grid if the dams are breached. Importantly, three of the four scenarios rely on the deployment of electric generation technologies not yet commercially available or the continued reliance upon combustion technologies. Only one scenario examines replacement of LSRD with non-emitting “mature” (currently existing) technologies.

According to the BPA-commissioned analysis, the scenario utilizing non-emitting mature technologies and not allowing any additional combustion generating assets to come online costs $75B and would result in a 65% rate increase. The study stated that, “No new combustion case drives impractically high levels of new renewable energy to meet firm capacity needs without new firm generation options.”

Oregon and Washington are required to meet state emissions laws and abide by laws restricting coal and natural gas generation. Without commercially viable technologies, BPA would be forced into the highest cost option.

In one of its most significant conclusions, the BPA commissioned report states, “Even in a best-case scenario, replacement power would cost several times as much as the lower Snake River dams cost.”

The NOAA document calls, in part, for the near term removal of the LSRD and developing fish passage at hydroelectric facilities in the Upper Columbia, including Grand Coulee and Dworshak, that currently block fish access to historic spawning grounds. The document places an emphasis on ensuring salmon return to the “last best high-elevation spawning and nursery habitats,” leaving open the possibility that other hydroelectric facilities should be removed in order to achieve this outcome. Importantly, the NOAA document does not say that these actions are required to recover

endangered species under the obligations of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) but rather to ensure “harvestable” levels of fish.

Regarding the NOAA/USFWS/Nez Perce/State of Oregon document, Miller continued, “the NOAA review draft was co-written by groups that have campaigned for years for dam removal. While the draft acknowledges the challenge of climate change for salmon, their recommendations would make climate change worse.”

Especially noteworthy from the “Review Draft” on page 18: “Nonetheless, our lack of precise measures or estimates of the magnitude of the biological benefit expected from large-scale management actions in no way indicates that we lack confidence in their efficacy…Some uncertainty surrounding the exact magnitude of beneficial response of acting does not warrant inaction.”

Miller added, “Climate change is the greatest threat for salmon. The lack of rigor in their draft makes for a sad day for the science of recovery.”

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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