



PRESS STATEMENT

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Murray-Inslee Report Falls Short, Fails to Recognize Significant Climate Impacts

Vancouver, Washington—June 9, 2022—Today the consultants hired by Senator Patty Murray and Governor Jay Inslee released their draft report on breaching the four hydroelectric dams on the lower Snake River. Northwest RiverPartners and many of its partner organizations have actively engaged in the Murray-Inslee Process from the beginning by encouraging a scientific approach on the necessary context and scope of the analysis to be performed. The organizations also provided substantive inputs and data on the contributions and value of the lower Snake River dams.

“Climate change is the greatest environmental challenge we face. Any serious analysis must be centered on whether an action moves us closer to or further away from our emissions goals. Unfortunately, when it comes to properly valuing the Snake River dams in combating climate change, the Murray-Inslee Draft Report doesn’t pass the test.” said Kurt Miller, executive director, Northwest RiverPartners.

“The most fundamental flaw of the draft report is the failure to recognize there is no practical way to replace the clean hydroelectric power generated by the dams on the lower Snake River and still meet our region’s carbon reduction timelines. In the foreseeable future, without the dams we would have two choices, accept regular blackouts that would risk lives or burn fossil fuels as a replacement, and all at a higher cost for every consumer in the region,” Miller continued.

To sum it up: Nearly 90% of the region’s renewable energy comes from hydropower. The lower Snake River dams help our region meet its climate goals which are critical to salmon recovery efforts. They keep the cost of power at a reasonable level for our most vulnerable populations and ensure reliable power supply by filling in the gaps for wind and solar generation at a time we are experiencing unprecedented change to the West Coast grid.

Throughout the process, Northwest RiverPartners and its members shared concerns that without an appropriate framework, policymakers, and the public could be left with an uninformed view of the real world, negative consequences of dam removal. While the draft report recognizes the insurmountable costs and harms that would be caused by dam breaching, many of the fears about the potential deficiencies of the approach to this analysis have been realized.

While this draft report makes clear that issues around climate, clean energy, cost, reliability, and salmon recovery are complicated, it fails to set reasonable legitimacy standards for information it relies upon. As a result, back-of-the-napkin estimates are assigned the same weight as NEPA compliant environmental analyses. That has resulted in a report that underweights the impacts of losing the lower Snake River dams.

“Oregon and Washington have a math problem. For the grid to work, we need a strong base of generation that is available 24x7—the kind the lower Snake River dams provide, but wind and solar cannot. As we remove coal and natural gas generation to fight climate change and seek to electrify ever-increasing amounts of our economy, hydropower will become even more important in maintaining an affordable and reliable power grid,” said Libby Calnon, general manager, Hood River Electric Cooperative.

The dams on the lower Snake River have shown that healthy salmon and dams can coexist. They also help our region meet climate goals in the future. Analyses by federal scientists in charge of salmon recovery efforts have concluded that the biggest threats to salmon survival are from the effects of climate change on ocean conditions. At best, this report undervalues the impacts of climate change on salmon survival; at worst it willfully ignores them.

“The Murray-Inslee draft report ignores the most recent National Environmental Policy Act-compliant federal study warning of the consequences of losing the lower Snake River dams, especially regarding the resulting increase in greenhouse gas emissions caused by the near-term requirement to replace the reliability of the dams with fossil fuel derived energy.” said Kristin Masteller, general manager, Mason PUD 1. “Thanks to major upgrades in fish passage facilities, fish survival rates through the Snake River dams is between 95% - 98%. Unfortunately, the report undervalues both the demonstrable progress made by Snake River Fall Chinook and Steelhead and the impacts of climate change on their long term survival.”

There is also no replacement for the 48,000 acres of productive farmland that would be lost if these dams are breached. Nor is there a replacement for an

affordable, low-carbon way to move the agricultural products of family farms to market.

“My family farm depends on low-cost, efficient transportation to move our wheat to market to feed people around the world. There simply is no alternative to barging that can move over 60 percent of Washington’s wheat as safely and efficiently, and without the lower Snake River dams, barging becomes non-existent,” said Michelle Hennings, executive director, Washington Association of Wheat Growers. “As both a farmer and the Executive Director of the Washington Association of Wheat Growers, I’m concerned about the draft Murray/Inslee report, which shows a lack of understanding of the practical impacts that breaching the lower Snake River dams would have on thousands of farmers across the Pacific Northwest. Increasing our reliance on rail and trucking will only drive up costs for farmers and consumers, further congest our railroads and highways, and add harmful emissions to our environment.”

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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>