



## PRESS RELEASE

**December 14, 2023**  
**Vancouver, WA**

### **Secret agreement between US government and anti-hydro plaintiff groups ignores the public and invites more litigation**

*The US Government Commitments were drafted in the shadows, rely on salmon recovery reports drafted by plaintiffs, ignore climate change, and will only invite more litigation and uncertainty.*

**Vancouver, Washington**—December 14, 2023—Today, despite public concern, the U.S. Government (USG) and plaintiffs to the litigation regarding Federal Columbia River Power System (FCRPS) operations filed a settlement agreement with the court. The plaintiffs have agreed to a five-year stay in the litigation, with an additional five-year option, pending implementation of a series of commitments agreed to by the USG.

This settlement and the resulting commitments were developed over a period of six months of secret negotiations between the USG and plaintiffs that excluded the meaningful participation of organizations representing the voice of millions of people in the Pacific Northwest. Throughout the mediation, Northwest RiverPartners (NWRP) submitted nearly 40 comments and studies to the USG and mediation team, yet no meaningful response or effort was made to include the perspective of the nearly 3 million electric utility customers NWRP represents.

While the lack of transparency and fairness are egregious enough, the settlement takes a challenging situation and makes it worse. Utilities are already struggling to ensure grid reliability and affordability, while meeting the region's climate objectives. The increased uncertainty introduced by this agreement leads to even greater risk for regional electricity rates, operational changes which could limit clean energy production, and the potential for further litigation.

“The agreement announced by the Biden Administration commits the U.S. Government to spending hundreds of millions of dollars that will ultimately end up being paid by electricity consumers in communities throughout the West. The outcome of the mediation devalues and degrades our region’s hydroelectric system by introducing more risks to costs, operations, litigation, and the ability to meet our region’s climate objectives. The Administration had a chance to bring people together on this contentious topic, but instead chose to exclude the concerns and issues raised by ratepayers and their representatives in this process. The lack of transparency and fairness shows in what can only be described as a serious threat to our region’s economy and clean energy future,” said Heather Stebbings, interim executive director of Northwest RiverPartners.

The settlement is an outgrowth of a process that was supposed to support collaborative development of “a durable long-term strategy to restore salmon and other native fish populations to healthy and abundant levels, honoring Federal commitments to Tribal Nations, delivering affordable and reliable clean power, and meeting the many resilience needs of stakeholders across the region.” Instead, this settlement undermines the future of achieving clean energy goals and will raise the rates of electricity customers across the region while exacerbating the greatest threat to salmon that NOAA scientists have identified – the warming, acidifying ocean.

There are many opportunities to improve habitat, fight climate change and utilize technology to improve salmon returns. Reintroduction of salmon in the Upper Columbia River, predator management, and eliminating Washington state’s nearly \$8 billion backlog of blocked fish passage are where the region and the nation should be focusing their energy to truly make a difference for fish while retaining our ability provide clean and affordable power to communities in the Northwest.

###

## **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>