



PRESS RELEASE

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Court proposals by plaintiffs would drive up electricity prices, increase blackout risk for millions of people in the Pacific Northwest

Northwest RiverPartners urges regional leaders to reject renewed litigation and work together to protect salmon and maintain affordable, reliable hydropower

Vancouver, Washington—October 14, 2025—Proposals by plaintiffs, including the State of Oregon, will increase electricity costs for millions of people in the Pacific Northwest, if approved by a federal judge. Northwest RiverPartners and a coalition of utilities, ports, and community organizations are urging regional leaders to reject renewed litigation and instead convene a collaborative, science-based process to protect and enhance Columbia River salmon populations and sustain affordable, reliable hydropower.

Hydropower is the backbone of the Northwest's economy, supplying about half of the region's electricity and providing reliable, affordable power to millions of homes, farms, and businesses. Federal dams in the Columbia and Snake River system also support navigation, irrigation, flood control, and recreation—benefits that are essential to the Northwest's economy and way of life. As electricity demand continues to grow, extreme proposals that do not appreciably improve fish returns will only make it harder to meet the region's shared energy and environmental goals.

“This is the moment for the Northwest to come together around real solutions,” said Clark Mather, executive director of Northwest RiverPartners. “We have a rare opportunity to protect salmon, strengthen our energy system, and keep electricity reliable and affordable across the region. We need a bigger, more inclusive table if we're going to make meaningful progress on these shared goals.”

“We all care deeply about salmon, and we recognize there is more work to do,” Mather added. “The science shows that climate, harvest, predation, and ocean conditions are major threats to salmon. Collaboration is the only way to meet both our energy and fish-recovery goals.”

“Public support for hydropower remains strong because people understand it delivers affordable, reliable energy and supports our regional economy,” said John Francisco, general manager of Big Bend Electric Cooperative and Vice Chair of the Northwest RiverPartners Board. “With so much uncertainty in energy markets right now, it’s critical that we strengthen, not weaken, the system that keeps electricity affordable and the lights on.”

Between 2022 and 2023, retail electric rates climbed 11 percent in Oregon. Washington residential rates jumped 12.6 percent between May 2024 and May 2025. The plaintiff’s proposal would cause energy bills to spike and increase the risk of regional electricity blackouts.

The plaintiff's motion was filed following a federal judge in the Oregon District restarting decades-long federal litigation against Columbia River System Operations (CRSO) in September. NW RiverPartners continues to urge leaders to have conversations in the region that can lead to durable, sustainable and effective solutions for the millions of people and fish that depend on the system.

Community-owned utilities across the Northwest are the largest funders of salmon recovery in the region, directing about 25 percent of every Bonneville Power Administration wholesale power bill to fish and wildlife programs, with more than half of those dollars invested in partnership with tribes and state agencies.

Thanks in large part to the investments in fish and wildlife by community-owned utilities, average fish returns have tripled since federal dams went into operation. In 1938, when Bonneville Dam was built, the first federal dam on the Columbia and Snake Rivers, just over 456,000 adult salmon and steelhead were counted. In 2024, 1.77 million salmon and steelhead returned past Bonneville Dam, more than 3.8 times higher than 1938.

A coalition of public utilities, advocacy organizations, and ports is urging Washington Governor Bob Ferguson and Oregon Governor Tina Kotek to meet with regional leaders in an inclusive process that incorporates the expertise and perspectives of all stakeholders. The coalition says this approach offers the best path to protect salmon, maintain grid reliability, and secure the Northwest's long-term energy future.

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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, Nevada, and Northern California. 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 improves communities and the natural environment, and we encourage science-based solutions that help hydropower and salmon coexist and thrive.