For Immediate Release
July 24, 2023

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Anti-Hydro Interests Continue Attack on NW Clean Energy

Removing region's hydroelectric infrastructure is anti-science and would result in more fossil fuel consumption

A group led by anti-hydro and harvest interests, including the Northwest Sportfishing Industry Association, Idaho Rivers United, Columbia Riverkeeper, and Idaho Conservation League, on Friday announced their intent to sue the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers regarding water temperatures in the Snake River.

In the hottest year ever recorded on Earth, these special interests are ignoring science by asserting that Snake River dams—not climate change--cause water conditions dangerous to sockeye salmon. If these groups are successful in destroying the Pacific Northwest's hydroelectric infrastructure, the region's biggest source of carbon-free energy, they would prolong the region's reliance on electricity produced from fossil fuels.

Kurt Miller, Northwest RiverPartners Executive Director said:

"It's concerning that anti-hydro interests are taking a position to remove our most important carbon-free energy source when they say they are concerned about hot river temperatures. Water is our power to fight climate change. Study after study demonstrates that we can't meet our clean energy goals without our existing hydroelectric infrastructure.

"Losing these dams inevitably means more years spent relying on fossil fuel electricity generation, increasing our carbon footprint, and making ocean and river temperatures more dangerous for salmon. Meeting our clean energy goals and continuing our salmon recovery efforts isn't advanced by lawsuits from special interests. As recent investments have shown, we can move toward recovering salmon and keeping our clean hydropower infrastructure."

Northwest RiverPartners has closely followed the science on river temperatures. Warmer air temperatures cause warmer river temperatures. There have been heat-related salmon die-offs in Canada's undammed Fraser River and undammed rivers as far north as Alaska.

It's also noteworthy that these groups filed a lawsuit over sockeye salmon, even though this year's Snake River sockeye returns are some of the best in recent memory.

This fight is not new, similar anti-hydro and salmon harvest interests took out a full-page ad in *The New York Times* in October 1999 urging then Vice President Gore to make the decision to remove the four Lower Snake River dams or Snake River Chinook salmon "will be extinct by 2017." According to *Columbia River Dart* data, a project of the University of Washington's School of Aquatic and Fisheries Sciences (Columbia River Dart), 15,783 total adult Chinook passed through Ice Harbor Dam in 1999, the lowest on the Snake River. Thanks to federal and ratepayer investments in fish passage and salmon recovery, those numbers had jumped to 63,983 in 2017 and by 2022 (the last data set available on the *Columbia River Dart* website), that number had increased to 118,759.

Miller added, “For a quarter of a century, anti-hydro interests have ignored the facts and the science on climate change and the important role our region’s hydroelectric dams play in helping meet the challenge of reducing our dependence on fossil fuels. By doing so, they hurt our efforts to reduce emissions and help salmon that are dying because of climate change.”

Key study reference sources below:

- PNNL peer-reviewed study showing lower Snake dams help mitigate extreme river temperature
- NOAA Fisheries peer-reviewed study showing undammed Salmon River is more at risk for extreme river temperatures than lower Snake River because the Salmon River doesn’t have dams to help maintain flows.
- Three studies demonstrating prolonged reliance on fossil fuels if dams are removed: “Executive Summary: Columbia River System Operations Environmental Impact Statement,” https://usace.contentdm.oclc.org/utils/getfile/collection/p16021coll7/id/14957; “2019 Biennial Energy Report: Issues, Analysis and Updates,” Washington State Department of Commerce: http://www.commerce.wa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/COMMERCE-Biennial-Energy.pdf, states: “First, without explicit policy support, the electrification of the state's economy - in particular, the conversion of various transportation uses from gasoline and diesel – will likely not be served entirely with renewable energy. Hydro is the main source of power in the existing mix, but Washington cannot add new large hydro projects to meet growth in electricity demand. A likely scenario is that utilities would meet growing demand with a combination of natural gas generation and enough new renewables to comply with the 15 percent standard under the EIA.”; https://nwriverpartners.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/EGPSC_LSRD-Power-Cost-Replacement-Study_6_29_2022_Final_1223.pdf: Due to existing decarbonization mandates all planned wind and solar generation is already spoken for. To keep the grid reliable without hydropower, we’d have to run more fossil fuel generation to try to meet energy demand equating to millions of additional metric tons of CO2.
- Climate impacts on salmon: The United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change’s “Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate” noted that declines in ecosystem function and fish populations have coincided with “unabated” warming of the ocean since 1970 (https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/sites/3/2022/03/01_SROCC_SPM_FINAL.pdf): Similarly, a peer-reviewed study by Dr. David Welch in 2020 compared Chinook salmon survival along the West Coast of North America during the same 50-year period. His study concluded that these populations have experienced a 65% decline in survival rates. Those figures apply to nearly pristine rivers in Southeast Alaska and Canada as well as more urban areas like the Puget Sound (“A synthesis of the coast-wide decline in survival of West Coast Chinook Salmon [*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha,* Salmonidae],” by David Warren Welch,Aswea Dawn Porter,Erin Leanne Rechisky; first published 30 October 2020); NOAA Fisheries Science Center published a peer-reviewed paper in 2021 showing that if ocean temperatures continue to warm at their current rate, key Chinook populations will be extinct within 40 years (“Climate change threatens Chinook salmon throughout their lifecycle,” by Lisa Crozier, Brian Burke, Brandon Chasco, Daniel Widener, Richard Zabel; published February 18, 2021).

- May 2020 EPA Total Maximum Daily Load for Temperature

  "Even if all the allocations in this TMDL are implemented and the temperature reductions envisioned are fully realized, it is unlikely that the numeric criteria portion of the WQS [Water Quality Standard] will be met at all times and all places. Sources outside the allocation structure of this TMDL contribute to warmer temperatures. **These sources include increased air temperatures throughout the study area and upstream human activities in Idaho and Canada, resulting in Columbia and Snake River water temperatures that already exceed the numeric criteria portion of the WQS when those rivers enter the geographic area covered by this TMDL**." (Emphasis added)