



House Committee on Natural Resources

Water, Wildlife, and Fisheries Subcommittee Hearing

Left in the Dark: Examining the Biden Administration's Efforts to Eliminate the Pacific Northwest's Clean Energy Production.

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Thank you for the opportunity to share American Rivers' perspective on the Pacific Northwest economic, energy, and ecological future. Since 1973, American Rivers has protected wild rivers, restored damaged rivers, and conserved clean water for people and nature. With headquarters in Washington, D.C. and 355,000 supporters, members, and volunteers across the country, we are the most trusted and influential national river conservation organization in the United States. As the nation's leading river advocate, American Rivers seeks to ensure our nation's rivers and floodplains are protected.

The lower four Snake River dams, which stretch between Tri-Cities, WA and Lewiston, ID, were constructed between 1957 and 1972. These dams provide around 900 average megawatts of power — around 4% of the Northwest's energy generation. They also provide irrigation for crops grown around the Tri-Cities, as well as transportation for barge traffic between the Tri-Cities and Lewiston. While the services the lower four Snake River dams provide are valuable to surrounding communities, those services can be replaced with alternative, and less damaging to the river, technologies. Science shows us that "breaching the four lower Snake River dams is necessary to (1) substantially improve the probability of recovering these cultural and ecological keystone species to healthy and harvestable populations and (2) safeguard those fishes from extinction." (American Fisheries Society 2023 citing Williams et al. 1989; Nehlsen et al. 1991; Thurow 2000; NOAA 2017, 2022; Isaak et al. 2018; Storch et al. 2022; TU 2022). Losing these iconic keystone species of the Pacific Northwest would be an economic, cultural, and ecological disaster with long-ranging implications for Columbia Basin Tribes, and for the coastal communities of Oregon and Washington, to the uppermost reaches of the Salmon River in the Sawtooth Mountains of Idaho.

American Rivers applauds the Biden administration for working with the Yakama, Nez Perce, Umatilla and Warm Springs Tribes and the states of Washington and Oregon to develop solutions to end the decades-long logjam of litigation over operation of the Snake River dams. We have moral, ethical, and environmental obligations to follow the science and honor our Tribal treaty obligations in pursuit of a solution in the Snake Basin.

According to fisheries scientists and government agencies, including the American Fisheries Society and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the only way to save ESA-listed populations of

salmon and steelhead in the Snake River Basin from extinction and return them to abundance, is to breach the lower four Snake River dams. The Columbia Basin Partnership Task Force, a collaboration of states, Tribes, federal agencies, and stakeholders across the region, adopted targets for achieving abundant and harvestable salmon and steelhead in the Columbia Basin. The only way to achieve these agreed upon targets is to breach the lower four Snake River dams.

The financial burden of recovering of Snake River salmon and steelhead must not fall only on ratepayers in the Pacific Northwest. Much like recovery of the Florida Everglades, the Great Lakes, and Chesapeake Bay, recovering salmon populations in the Snake Basin is a national responsibility that should be borne by the United States Government. Only the U.S. Government has the obligations and resource ability to honor Tribal treaties, support communities who will be impacted by the transition of services, and restore the basin to support salmon populations.

Efforts to scare the public with outsized estimates of impacts on utility bills are both misleading and disingenuous. If costs of replacing the power provided by the lower four Snake River dams are borne by the US Government, the results will be minimal impacts on utility bills and greater certainty for utility providers for decades to come. We have already seen a transformation in our energy portfolio with new wind, solar, and storage resources that seemed impossible 20 years ago. With unprecedented federal funding available through the Inflation Reduction Act and the bi-partisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, there has never been a better time to invest in a bold new vision for the future of power in the Pacific Northwest.

The longer we continue to delay, obfuscate, and distract with misinformation, the more drastic becomes the need, and more urgent the timeline, for action to invest in a sustainable economic future to save these fish from extinction. We have an opportunity to come together as a region to develop solutions to large-scale challenges involved with replacing the services provided by the lower four Snake River dams, in a manner that will keep stakeholders and impacted communities whole and position the region to move boldly into the next century. American Rivers stands with Tribal Nations of the Northwest, our NGO partners, local communities, and impacted stakeholders to help make that vision a reality. The actions and commitments from the Biden Administration are a meaningful step in that direction.

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<https://fisheries.org/policy-media/recent-policy-statements/statement-of-the-american-fisheries-society-afs-and-the-western-division-afs-wdafs-about-the-need-to-breach-the-four-dams-on-the-lower-snake-river>

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