

Written Testimony of the Pacific Northwest Waterways Association

Submitted to the U.S. House Committee on Natural Resources in support of H.R.2073, the
Defending Our Dams Act

September 3, 2025

The Honorable Harriet Hageman
Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries
House Committee on Natural Resources
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515
Transmitted via email (Kirby.struhar@mail.house.gov)

Dear Chairwoman Hageman and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this written testimony in support of H.R.2073, the *Defending Our Dams Act*. The Pacific Northwest Waterways Association (PNWA) is a regional coalition of ports, farmers, towboat operators, labor, and businesses who rely on the Columbia-Snake River System to move products to market and sustain economic vitality across the Northwest.

Importance of the Lower Snake River Dams to the Movement of Goods

The four lower Snake River dams—Ice Harbor, Lower Monumental, Little Goose, and Lower Granite—are essential to the safe, reliable, and cost-effective movement of millions of tons of cargo. Together with the Columbia River dams, they form a continuous 465-mile federally maintained waterway from Lewiston, Idaho to the Pacific Ocean that allows the Snake and Columbia Rivers to function as a critical trade gateway for the country and world:

- **Exports:** The Columbia-Snake River System operates as the largest wheat export gateway in the U.S., and second largest U.S. gateway for soy and corn. This volume draws from farmers in Pacific Northwest states like Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and Montana, and from Midwestern states like Minnesota, Iowa, Illinois, North and South Dakota, Nebraska, and Kansas. Combined, this system represents the third largest grain export gateway in the world. Other products like mineral bulk from the Southwest and timber products from the Northwest make the gateway number one in both for exports on the nation's West Coast. All these products rely on barging as the most efficient and competitive way to reach international markets.
- **Marine Highway 84:** The Columbia, Willamette, and Snake Rivers are designated by the U.S. Maritime Administration as *Marine Highway 84*, part of the national network of

America's Marine Highways. This designation underscores the federal recognition that river systems are of equal importance, and in some cases, of more importance to the movement of cargo via barge compared to transport on railroad or via truck on the Interstate Highways. Here, the U.S. Maritime Administration clearly values and sees the use of Marine Highway 84 as the most efficient way to transport goods to the global market while easing congestion on road and rail and reducing emissions.

- **Efficiency & Reliability:** A single barge tow can carry the equivalent of 140 rail cars or 538 semi-trucks. Removing barging capacity would force this traffic onto already congested rail and highway systems, raising costs for farmers and shippers, increasing emissions, damaging road infrastructure, and hurting global market competitiveness.

Ironically, there is growing scientific evidence that chemicals in “tire dust,” the fine particles that enter the atmosphere as car and truck tires wear has lethal impacts on salmon when it settles on waterways. Salmon advocates calling for dam removal may cause more harm to salmon if they force a shift away from river barging.

National Benefits and Strategic Importance

The Columbia-Snake River System is more than a regional asset—it is a *national* economic engine:

- **Energy & Grid Reliability:** The lower Snake River dams provide clean, flexible, carbon-free hydropower to millions across the Northwest, critical for grid stability as renewable resources scale up.
- **Trade Competitiveness:** As the gateway for Asia-bound agricultural exports, the Snake River dams strengthen U.S. competitiveness in world markets. Every dollar of transportation savings translates into stronger farm economies and more resilient rural communities.
- **Safety & Sustainability:** Barging is the safest and most environmentally efficient mode of freight transport. As mentioned above, each tow on the Snake River eliminates hundreds of truck trips, reducing highway accidents, “tire dust,” and carbon emissions.

Why H.R.2073 Matters

The *Defending Our Dams Act* provides much-needed certainty to everyone who relies on the Columbia-Snake River System by affirming its importance to the federal hydropower and river navigation system, reiterating the need for congressional authorization for dam breaching and that no Administration should even study dam removal without congressional approval. For communities, producers, and businesses in the Pacific Northwest, this clarity is essential.

Ongoing litigation and uncertainty about the future of the dams threaten investment, undermine market stability, and weaken our supply chains.

H.R.2073 ensures that any decisions with the immense national economic, energy, and transportation consequences, remain where they belong—before the elected representatives of the American people.

Conclusion

The Pacific Northwest Waterways Association strongly supports H.R.2073. The Lower Snake River dams and Marine Highway 84 are indispensable to farmers, barge operators, ports, utilities, and consumers across the nation. This system delivers affordable, reliable, and sustainable transportation and energy—cornerstones of America’s economic strength.

On behalf of PNWA, I urge this Committee and Congress to pass the *Defending Our Dams Act* and safeguard this vital infrastructure for generations to come.