



September 3, 2024

The Honorable Bruce Westerman  
Chairman, Committee on Natural Resources  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Jared Huffman  
Ranking Member, Committee on Natural  
Resources  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Harriet Hageman  
Chairwoman, Water, Wildlife and Fisheries  
Subcommittee  
Committee on Natural Resources  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Val Hoyle  
Ranking Member, Water, Wildlife and Fisheries  
Subcommittee  
Committee on Natural Resources  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairs Westerman and Hageman and Ranking Members Huffman and Hoyle:

On behalf of the Washington Association of Wheat Growers (WAWG), thank you for the opportunity to submit a letter for the record for the House Natural Resources Committee Water, Wildlife, and Fisheries Subcommittee Legislative Hearing on H.R. 2073, H.R. 3692, H.R. 4255, H.R. 4256 and H.R. 4970.

WAWG represents over 4,000 producers across the state of Washington, who rely on the Columbia Snake River System (CSRS), and the Lower Snake River dams (LSRD) in particular, for their livelihoods. The CSRS system moves a significant volume of wheat, corn, soybeans, lumber products, and crop inputs. Specifically, wheat growers in the Pacific Northwest (PNW) utilize the river system daily. In fact, Washington is the fourth largest wheat exporter in the nation<sup>1</sup>, exporting 90 percent of the wheat produced in the state. <sup>2</sup> Nationally, more than 55 percent of all U.S. wheat exports move through the PNW by barge or rail. Specifically, 10

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<sup>1</sup> State Agricultural Trade Data. USDA ERS - State Agricultural Trade Data. (2022).

<https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/state-agricultural-trade-data/>

<sup>2</sup> Fortenbery, T. R., & Nadreau, T. P. (n.d.). Contribution of Wheat Production to the Washington

Economy. <https://acrobat.adobe.com/id/urn:aaid:sc:VA6C2:43500d5f-3bf2-4b1d-a6bc-670d94acc4b3>

percent of wheat that is exported from the United States passes through the four locks and dams along the Lower Snake River<sup>3</sup>.

The wheat industry along with key partners at the U.S. Department of Agriculture have spent decades building strong relationships with international trading partners. The reliability of U.S. wheat exports can largely be attributed to our world class infrastructure system, which allows us to ship products safely and efficiently around the world. Should that infrastructure be disrupted, we will put those relationships at risk; therefore, weakening the United States' standing in the global marketplace.

In addition, some have claimed that the transportation benefits of the Dams can be replaced; however, we believe that is not an accurate assessment. Other alternatives such as rail may not be feasible in certain areas and additional trucks on the road could increase pollution and congestion on the roads. In fact, one loaded covered hopper barge carries over 58,000 bushels of wheat. It would take 113,187 semi-trailers each year carrying 910 bushels of wheat to replace the 103 million bushels shipped on the Snake River via barge annually. That is 310 more trucks each day, making round trips to the Tri-Cities, 365 days per year.<sup>4</sup> Notably, there is already a driver shortage in the trucking industry so finding people to drive trucks will likely be virtually impossible.

Moving forward, we believe that any decisions made should be based on sound science and reliable research. In recent years arbitrary standards such as they "healthy and harvestable" standard in the 2022 NOAA Rebuilding Interior Columbia Basin Salmon and Steelhead report have been used to justify and encourage actions that would ultimately cause adverse impacts to functionality of the dams and potentially lead to breaching. However, reliable and thorough data in the 2020 Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) released jointly by the Army Corps of Engineers, Bureau of Reclamation, and Bonneville Power Administration revealed that removing the LSRD goes against environmental statutes and public interests. The report indicated that continued operation of the dams, along with maintaining and improving fish passage technology and implementing operational water management flexibilities to improve flow would "provide the most balanced way to fulfill all of the CRS [Columbia River System] projects' congressionally authorized purposes, meets a majority of the CRSO EIS [Columbia River System Operations Environmental Impact Statement] objectives, minimizes and avoids adverse impacts to the environment, benefits tribal interests and treaty resources, and provides additional improvements for ESA-listed species."<sup>5</sup> As such, we strongly believe that dams and salmon can and do co-exist.

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<sup>3</sup> Facts about U.S. wheat exports and the Columbia Snake River system. U.S. Wheat Associates. (2022, March 28). <https://www.uswheat.org/wheatletter/facts-about-u-s-wheat-exports-and-the-columbia-snake-river-system/>

<sup>4</sup> Compare cargo capacities. US Army Corps of Engineers - Walla Walla District . (n.d.). <https://www.nww.usace.army.mil/Portals/28/docs/navigation/CargoComparison.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Army Corps of Engineers – Northwestern Division, Bureau of Reclamation – Columbia-Pacific Northwest Region, & Bonneville Power Administration (DOE/EIS-0529). (2020,



The opportunities to ensure salmon populations continue to grow do not have to come at the cost of destroying the integrity of the CSRS. We support investments made at the federal and state level including the installation of mechanisms along the river to ensure salmon runs remain intact, culvert removal, fish habitat restoration, toxin reduction, and predator abatement.

As farmers are already faced with significant increases in cost of production, the importance of the LSRD cannot be overstated. In addition, we have grave concerns regarding the precedence that dam breaching could set on inland waterways across the country. WAWG stands ready to work with other stakeholders and decision makers to ensure farmers across the country have access to critical inland waterways needed to transport their goods.

Sincerely,

Michelle Hennings  
Executive Director