



September 22, 2025

The Honorable Harriet Hageman
Chair
Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife, and Fisheries
U.S. House Committee on Natural Resources
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chair Hageman,

It was an honor and a privilege to testify before the Water, Wildlife, and Fisheries Subcommittee in support of H.R. 2073, the "Defending Our Dams Act." We appreciate the opportunity to inform Congress about the value of the four Lower Snake River Dams and their important impact on energy security, affordability, and reliability, in addition to the other significant services they provide, including navigation, irrigation, and recreation.

Thank you for your additional question from the hearing:

Mr. Mather, your testimony mentioned that President Trump's decision to withdraw from the settlement agreement regarding the Lower Snake River dams was welcomed by your organization and many stakeholders across the Pacific Northwest. However, we know that there is always more to be done to solve these issues. What more can the Congress and the Trump Administration do to provide certainty to your region?

The issues surrounding the Columbia River System Operations (CRSO) have been debated and litigated for decades. As I stated in my testimony, the need for H.R. 2073 is to ensure that the invaluable services provided by the Lower Snake River Dams receive the protections they deserve. Unfortunately, even with President Trump's decision to withdraw from the CRSO settlement agreement established by the previous administration, efforts continue to undermine the system.

Beyond passing H.R. 2073, there are multiple other avenues where Congress and the Trump Administration can be supportive of the region. They include:

- Vigorously defending the 2020 Federal Columbia River Power System (FCRPS) Biological Opinion (BiOp) and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in upcoming litigation. The Department of Justice has never had the opportunity to defend the 2020 decision in court. The Trump Administration must be well-prepared to defend the BiOp and EIS, defending them forcefully and arguing against any additional spill modifications.
- Rescinding the 2022 Rebuilding Interior Columbia Basin Salmon and Steelhead paper and taking efforts to demonstrate the inappropriateness of the construction of the report, including the participation of FCRPS plaintiffs in writing it. The recovery standards presented in this paper are flawed and not based on accurate or current best science, as they deviate from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) science used to support the 2020 FCRPS BiOp. Additionally, the recovery standards lack a statutory or regulatory foundation. Further, it remains in question who actually authored the paper, as it is unsigned and has not been peer reviewed.
- Prohibiting federal funds from being utilized by the States of Washington and Oregon to implement temperature Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) without revisions to incorporate better science.
- Memorializing hydropower as one of America's most important, affordable, reliable, and clean energy sources. Recognize that load growth is adding additional strains on the bulk electric grid, increasing affordability and reliability challenges, and that the current output of the electric system is vital for protecting the health and well-being of all Americans. Memorialize that additional hydropower output from federal and non-federal facilities should be considered when science and the law allow.
- Prioritizing the use of Columbia and Snake River hydropower to meet the needs of a growing economy. Federal agencies should be directed to immediately study and implement measures to enhance the output and capability of the Columbia River hydropower system, including the hydraulic and electrical coordination of federal and non-federal Columbia River dams, as well as the enhanced use of headwater storage. This effort should also include the use of adaptive, real-time reservoir rule curves, particularly during major energy droughts or extreme market events, to strengthen grid reliability.

- Requiring all non-federal agency entities, e.g., states and tribes, to sign federal fish ‘accord’ agreements with the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) before receiving fish and wildlife funding supported by ratepayers. The new fish accords should require signers to support the 2020 BiOp that balances anadromous fish recovery, hydro-system reliability, and the other needs of millions of Americans. The new ‘accords’ should also require all signing parties to refrain from being a party to litigation against any federal agency on matters pertaining to the operation of the Federal Columbia River Power System.
- Ensuring that any federal or state action on the FCRPS that advocates for a reduction in the output or operational efficiency, or calls for reduced flood risk management levels impacting navigation system reliability, or that could negatively impact the Northwest economy, including irrigation, agricultural production, or access to domestic water, must be done in an open, transparent public process, similar to what is required under the National Environmental Policy Act.
- Ending the concept of “replacement” power for the Lower Snake River Dams in any foreseeable timeframe. The unique attributes of hydropower cannot be replaced in any foreseeable time frame with any other existing renewable energy-generating resource. Hydropower is unique in its ability to ramp to meet load, is renewable, highly reliable, affordable, and can be stored to provide base load power when other renewable resources are unavailable (no wind or sun).
- Implementing a prohibition on the use of federal funding by federal or state agencies to advocate, develop, or implement recovery standards that are not grounded in peer-reviewed scientific studies and that are not supported by Endangered Species Act (ESA) recovery standards.
- Directing federal agencies involved in the “replacement studies” as part of the CRSO settlement agreement to re-analyze prior work and make amendments as necessary or end the studies. This includes the following agencies and “replacement studies”:
 - Transportation “replacement study” – U.S. Department of Transportation, U.S. Department of Agriculture.
 - Energy “replacement study” including the Pacific Northwest Regional Planning Project (PREPP) – U.S. Department of Energy (DOE).

- Water supply analysis and infrastructure “replacement study” – Bureau of Reclamation.
 - Recreation and public access analysis “replacement study” – US Army Corps of Engineers.
- Directing federal agencies to vigorously support and extend, if requested, successful hydropower habitat conservation plans (HCPs) and/or settlement agreements for non-federal hydropower projects where standards are being met.
- Requiring independent scientific review of spill's impacts on all impacted fish species, how and where total dissolved gas is measured, and quantifying the spill's impact on the affordability and reliability of the electric system.
- Fully funding Mitchell Act Hatcheries Operation & Maintenance, Pacific Salmon programs including pinniped removal, and the Pacific Coast Salmon Recovery Fund, all within the National Marine Fisheries Service, as well as the Pacific Salmon Treaty at the U.S. Department of Commerce, Interior, and State, and Columbia River Fish Mitigation and Willamette Valley Fish production through the USACE.

While this represents a rather extensive list of opportunities to support hydropower in the Pacific Northwest, it also represents the significant value of the Columbia and Snake River system to our communities, economy, and way of life for tens of millions of Americans. We absolutely agree that hydropower must mitigate its impacts on salmon and steelhead recovery and survival, but dams are not the sole contributor to fish health. Programs must be holistic and attentive to the entirety of a salmon’s lifecycle and based on science, not rhetoric.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify and respond to your additional question. We appreciate your continued leadership on these critical issues.

Sincerely,



Clark Mather
Executive Director