Hearing before the House Natural Resources Committee
Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife, and Fisheries
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Regarding H.R. 2073 – "*Defending our Dams Act*"

Written Testimony for Clark Mather
Executive Director, Northwest RiverPartners

Chair Hageman, Ranking Member Hoyle, Committee members, and Representative Dan Newhouse, thank you for holding this important hearing today and for inviting me to testify on these issues, central to the lives of millions of Americans in the Pacific Northwest. My name is Clark Mather, and I'm the Executive Director of Northwest RiverPartners.

Northwest RiverPartners (NWRP) represents not-for-profit, community-owned electric utilities in Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, Northern California, Utah, Nevada, and Wyoming that rely on the hydropower generated from the Columbia-Snake River System to meet the needs of their more than three million customers. NWRP also represents farmers, labor unions, private businesses, ports, and users of clean, reliable river transportation and navigation.

These federal dams in the Pacific Northwest provide millions of Americans with reliable, clean hydropower, keep energy costs low, provide valuable irrigation and cargo movement, support municipal water and wastewater treatment facilities, and have contributed to the establishment of an important recreation economy, which is why I am pleased to be here today to support Rep. Newhouse's bill, the "Defending our Dams Act."

Grid Reliability

Since 2021, many states have experienced rolling blackouts due to energy shortages during extreme weather. While the Pacific Northwest has avoided those emergencies, due mostly to the efficiency of the federal hydropower system, we have experienced near misses.

Recent reports from the Western Electricity Coordinating Council warn that all subregions of the West are moving toward elevated risk for blackouts. This warning is consistent with the North American Energy Reliability Corporation's May 2023 assessment that two-thirds of the nation could experience blackouts under extreme weather.[i]

The federal hydropower system in the Pacific Northwest includes four important dams on the Snake River in Washington state, referred to as the Lower Snake River Dams or LSRD. The LSRD play an essential role in both preventing blackouts and recovering from them should they occur. The LSRD typically carry roughly 25% of the operating reserves of the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA), the Power Marketing Administration responsible for operating and selling the power from the LSRD. Operating reserves are like insurance that

utilities hold back in case of an emergency. These reserves were critical in 2021 during a winter cold snap and a subsequent heat dome in June. BPA has publicly stated that the LSRDs prevented rolling blackouts in its service territory during this particular heat wave. Even with the grid intact, more than 500 people died in the region as a result of heat-related illness in 2021.

BPA Administrator John Hairston said at the time, "This is another example of the value these facilities provide the region from a clean energy perspective. As the region continues to discuss the future of these facilities, we believe it is important to provide data and information about their performance as a solid foundation for discussions about the future of these four dynamic dams that provide carbon-free electricity and are important assets to mitigating the impacts of climate change."[ii]

The LSRDs were also critical in preventing a September 2022 blackout in California, where the dams increased their output during the evening peak demand period to maintain air conditioning for hundreds of thousands of homes in the state.

Two studies were completed in 2022 that highlight the significance of the LSRDs in achieving clean energy objectives and sustaining the electrical grid. NWRP commissioned a study that determined losing the LSRD would likely delay the region's decarbonization objectives by five years, add five to nine million metric tons of CO2 to the atmosphere, and cost roughly $15 billion on a Net Present Value basis.[iii] The second study of significance was the "BPA Lower Snake River Dams Power Replacement Study" commissioned by BPA. While measuring different metrics than the NWRP study, it pointed to a similarly challenging energy environment without the full complement of the Pacific Northwest hydro resources. That study estimated that 2,300–2,700 MW would be needed to replace the dams, and that the lost output of the LSRD would result in a significant cost to ratepayers and the region.[iv]

Navigation and Transportation Infrastructure

Between 50 and 60 million tons of cargo are transported each year on the Columbia-Snake Navigation System, beginning on the Snake River near Lewiston, Idaho, and Clarkston, Washington, moving to the Snake and Columbia River confluence near Pasco, Washington, and then following the Columbia River to its confluence with the Pacific Ocean near Astoria, Oregon. Recognized as Marine Highway 84 (M-84), this 465-mile federal waterway and navigation system allows farmers to export grain and other crops grown in the interior parts of the United States to overseas markets and supports mineral and auto exports amounting to more than $25 billion in cargo value.[v]

The LSRD include significant lock systems that allow for the navigation of barge transport, with the Snake River itself facilitating the transport of tens of millions of bushels of the finest wheat to feed the world. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the volumes of grain transported make it the #1 wheat export gateway in the United States.

Just one grain export operation, the Lewis Clark Terminal (LCT) located at the Port of Lewiston in Idaho, loads approximately 200 barges per year or around 24,000,000 bushels of wheat. As a cooperative, LCT represents 3,000 farms and farm families in the region. Not only do these families depend on barge transport for their livelihoods, but if river transport didn't exist, it would take at least 25,000 trucks a year to move just LCT's grain to the Tri-Cities, all on largely two-lane, curved, and perilous highways.[vi]

Manufacturing industries have come to rely on these rivers and dams for the passage of these and other goods, including renewable energy infrastructure such as wind turbines and their blades, the movement of fertilizer for crop production, and other over-dimensional project-based cargo.

The U.S. Department of Transportation and the Maritime Administration (MARAD) recognize the value of M-84 and the economic development possibilities that exist along the waterway. M-84 represents significant growth potential for hundreds of thousands of people, many of whom come from disadvantaged and underserved communities. Tens of millions of dollars in federal and non-federal investments have helped build out infrastructure in this nationally significant corridor.

In addition to the expanded manufacturing and barging potential for our region, the LSRD support the expansion of a growing cruise industry that brings thousands of tourists into the area annually, injecting millions of new dollars into the local economy. This is a relatively new and exciting industry for the communities that dot the Columbia-Snake River System and for the thousands of Americans who come to enjoy this unique experience every year. The cruise industry represents significant potential to support jobs and economic development. Just this year, the Port of Lewiston celebrated the opening of the most inland cruise boat dock on the West Coast with hopes of generating up to $16 million annually in tourism-related revenue.

Water Infrastructure

The Columbia River and its tributaries provide water for millions of people throughout the Columbia River Basin. Farmers depend on water from the system to irrigate crops that contribute to the national economy. These high-value crops include grains, alfalfa, and fruits and vegetables, including the wine grapes that form the foundation of the Northwest wine industry.

The mainstem Columbia River, lower Snake River, Clearwater River, Kootenai River, Pend Oreille River, and Flathead River provide water for millions of people and irrigated agriculture in Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and Montana. Water is pumped from the reservoirs of nine of the 14 federal projects: Grand Coulee, Lower Granite, Lower

Monumental, Little Goose, Ice Harbor, McNary, John Day, The Dalles, and Bonneville. Annually, about seven million acre-feet of water is supplied for irrigation, drinking water, and other municipal and industrial (M&I) needs.

The LSRD are also essential to maintain the water table for communities that line the Snake River. For instance, in Lewiston, Idaho, the water table created by the LSRD pool is critical as it allows for the continued safe operation of one of the region's largest employers, Clearwater Paper. In Clarkston, Washington, the water table is necessary for the city's wastewater treatment facility to meet the Washington State Department of Ecology's regulations.

The water table also maintains municipal water use, is a draw for new economic investment, and supports state and local recreation investments in docks and parks. In many cases, Snake River communities have been able to deliver water without wells and treat wastewater without septic systems because of the established water table. These are all projects that required significant local investment and approval from local and state jurisdictions.

What Happened During the Biden Administration

As a defendant intervener in the decades-long litigation over the Columbia River System Operations (CRSO), NWRP had a front-row seat to the efforts undertaken by the Biden Administration to achieve an out-of-court settlement regarding this protracted dispute. As we maintained and communicated throughout that process, the Federal Government truly had an opportunity to achieve a consensus agreement regarding salmon recovery, but instead opted to ignore meaningful contributions by experts in the energy and river transportation sectors.

Before addressing the substantive concerns regarding the actions taken by the Biden Administration in relation to the multi-purpose federal hydropower system, we think it is essential for the Committee to have some details on the process for how the agreements were reached.

The framework for the discussions was defined by objectives identified in the August 4, 2022 federal stay order for the litigation regarding the CRSO, stating:

> *During the litigation stay, the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) and the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service (FMCS) led a process that engaged Tribes, States, and other stakeholders. As part of these efforts, the United States committed to developing strategies through inclusive regional collaborative processes that restore native fish and their affected habitats, honor the United States' commitments to Tribal Nations, deliver affordable clean power, and satisfy other interests served by the Columbia River System projects.*

Despite the objectives suggesting an interest in stakeholder or other river user input, the process from the very beginning leaned heavily into dam removal, the underlying intent and purpose for the plaintiff's long-standing litigation over the CRSO.

Later in 2022, CEQ presented the NWRP and parties to the mediation with a draft "CRSO Litigation Stay –Schedule of Actions and Critical Milestones for the Long-Term Strategy." This document sought to establish a more detailed framework for the mediated discussions, as well as a rough outline of a timeline for those discussions. NWRP and other stakeholders were asked to make suggestions and comments on the draft document, and so we did. We received no written response to our submission. When we asked about the status of this document and the identified timeline in later discussions, CEQ staff acted as though they had never produced the "Schedule of Actions and Critical Milestones" document.

The process then proceeded with the establishment of a series of "work groups" that were designed to foster dialogue and idea exchange around a range of topics, including, for example, "Reintroduction," "Long-Term Power System Reliability and Clean Energy Goals," "Climate Change and Ocean Conditions," and "Fisheries/Harvest and Hatcheries." On January 5, 2023, NWRP and the Pacific Northwest Waterways Association wrote a letter [ENCLOSED] to the FMCS detailing concerns about how the process was being conducted. We received our response [ENCLOSED] from Sarah Cudahy, FMCS' Associate Deputy Director for Field Operations on February 7, 2023 in which she stated, "I encourage you to continue to bring any substantive suggestions for adjustment or proposals you may have to any of the upcoming Working Group 2 meetings that will address a number of topics including those detailed in your letter."

Beginning in early 2023, NWRP and other parties to the mediation participated in workgroup meetings and submitted written responses to prompts provided by CEQ. NWRP provided and presented hundreds of pages of responses, reports, and analyses to help inform the dialogue, which were responsive to meeting the multiple objectives articulated in the original stay order. We did not receive a single substantive response to any of these submissions.

And then, without notice or disclosure as to the reason, the "work group" meetings stopped. We did not know it then but know now that termination of the "work group" process coincided with the initiation of secret negotiations between the Biden Administration and a group of six of the sovereigns -- the States of Oregon and Washington, the Nez Perce Tribe, Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation, Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, and the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation.

After some period of time, NWRP and other parties to the mediation learned of the secret negotiations, though we were not fully aware of who was participating. On August 30, 2023, NWRP and other parties to the mediation process wrote a letter to CEQ Chair Mallory

detailing our concerns regarding the process her agency was leading [ENCLOSED]. We received no response.

While CEQ and FMCS were unwilling to accommodate other defendant intervenors in the process, strangely, the Federal Government repeatedly acknowledged the validity of our concerns about being excluded from negotiations, even prompting a U.S. Justice Department attorney to call the process they utilized "a mistake." Remarkably, despite this admission, the Biden Administration forged ahead on this errant course without making any adjustments.

After spending at least five months in secret negotiations with the "Six Sovereigns" without meaningfully engaging other stakeholders, including defendant intervenors, CEQ provided NWRP and other parties to the mediation with only eight business days to respond to a draft "Commitments Document" the Biden Administration had produced as a settlement proffer to the "Six Sovereigns." NWRP produced a 15-page letter and a detailed redline of the draft "Commitments Document," which, like all previous submissions, went unanswered.

Similarly, requests that FMCS facilitate discussions to walk through both our comment letter and our redline of the "Commitments Document" with the appropriate U.S. Government representatives, and to facilitate a meeting with representatives of the "Six Sovereigns" were never fulfilled.

We think it is important for the Committee to understand the many ways that the Biden Administrations' management of the process failed to not only live up to the letter and spirit of the approach articulated at the start of the mediation process, but failed to meaningfully accommodate the views of experts in the region working to maintain grid reliability and energy affordability, particularly for some of our most vulnerable populations, as we struggle to meet the challenges of climate change.

We entered this dialogue in good faith, knowing that we would not agree with everything we heard or was being suggested, but we were prepared to listen, learn, and engage. We had hoped that the Biden Administration and other parties would approach the process with the same spirit. Unfortunately, we were informed by the mediators and Administration representatives that, because the plaintiffs found it too uncomfortable to hear facts and positions with which they might disagree, we needed to be excluded from the dialogue.

Predictably, the settlement agreements resulting from this process reflected the lack of meaningful engagement across a broad cross-section of regional stakeholders. The agreement included:

- Open-ended financial and rate risks for BPA and Ratepayers
- No long-term operational certainty due to lack of true forbearance

- An unprecedented shift in data access and decision-making regarding the future of BPA and the CRSO
- A requirement to outline revisions to environmental reviews based on bad science and faulty assumptions
- A requirement for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to conduct dam breaching "feasibility studies"
- And a false narrative regarding the impacts of breaching the LSRD

The Biden Administration agreements and the processes used to implement them created a roadmap and infrastructure that privileged the "Six Sovereigns" in obtaining information from the U.S. Government and embedding them in the decision-making process regarding the CRSO to the exclusion of other regional stakeholders and sovereign U.S. states.

This access and the systems embedded in the implementation process provided the "Six Sovereigns" with the unique ability to influence policy outcomes without transparency or accountability. While most members of the "Six Sovereigns" are on the record for calling for the breaching of the four Lower Snake River dams, individual members of this group have also publicly called for the removal of the Bonneville, The Dalles, and John Day hydroelectric dams on the Columbia River.[vii]

Other sovereigns, including the states of Idaho and Montana, were not afforded the same privileges.

This was a disservice to the people of the Pacific Northwest who rely on the reliable and affordable power, navigation benefits, irrigation, and recreation produced by these state-of-the-art hydropower assets.

As the process for implementing the various aspects of the agreement unfolded, unfortunately, the Biden Administration and the "Six Sovereigns" maintained their position that stakeholders who were not 100% aligned with their agenda were not welcome in the decision-making process.

While the Biden Administration-led process presented itself as inclusive, the process and the resulting agreement were, in fact, the exact opposite.

Fish Returns Have Tripled Since Federal Dams Were Built

Hydropower enjoys overwhelming support from Pacific Northwest residents, in no small measure, because more than three-fourths of the region's renewable generation and half of its total electricity production is supplied by hydroelectric dams. As a result, the Pacific Northwest has the most affordable clean energy in the nation and provides the greatest promise of any U.S. region for achieving aggressive decarbonization mandates.

Hydroelectric dams and salmon share the same river system. If salmon populations falter, dams are often singled out as the primary cause of the problem. However, the U.S.

Government's own data estimates that from 1915 to 1938, less than one million adult salmon returned to the Columbia River Basin each year, on average.[viii]

In 1938, the year the first federal Columbia River dam went into operation, less than half a million fish returned to the River. And these were not all "wild" fish, as hatcheries have been operating on the system since the late 19th century.

Since then, adult salmon and steelhead returns have tripled, peaking at over 2.37 million salmon and steelhead, thanks in large part to the billions of dollars that ratepayers have invested in recovery.

Salmon recovery has historically relied on addressing the four H's – hydropower, habitat, hatcheries, and harvest. It is curious that, today, nearly all the focus is placed on the dams.

Environmental NGO's took out a full-page ad in *The New York Times* in October 1999 urging then Vice President Gore to decide to remove the four LSRD or Snake River salmon "will disappear forever." According to *Columbia River Dart* data, a project of the University of Washington's School of Aquatic and Fisheries Sciences, 10,193 total salmon passed through Lower Granite Dam in 1999, the most upstream federal dam on the Snake River. Last year, thanks to federal and ratepayer investments in fish passage and salmon recovery, those numbers had jumped to 105,174 adult salmon – 10 times higher than the 1999 numbers.[ix]

In a mid-May 2023 interview, Richie Graves, NOAA's Columbia Hydropower Branch Chief, noted:

> *For every 100 young chinook and steelhead that head downstream and past the four dams every spring, about 75 survive. "That's pretty good," said Ritchie Graves, Columbia Hydropower Branch chief for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. "In a lot of river systems, that would be something they would shoot for." For each of the four dams, NOAA maintains a separate survival standard for juvenile salmon heading downstream. The agency wants 96% survival for yearling chinook and steelhead, and 93% for "subyearling" chinook less than a year old. The dams are achieving those performance standards, Graves said. For adult fish swimming upstream, the survival rate is above 90%.*[x]

Those numbers are still not where we want them to be, but major investments in fish passage systems at dams have brought Columbia and Snake River Basin numbers in line with salmon return numbers along the West Coast of North America.

In the Snake River Basin, where ESA-listed Chinook salmon migrate through eight major dams, subyearling survival of *hatchery* Chinook is higher than the aggregate subyearling smolt to adult return rate (SAR = survival) from most regions of the west coast of North

America, despite the shortness of streams in these other regions and the general absence of dams.[xi]

When comparing *wild* populations, the results are essentially the same. Chinook return rates from outside of the Columbia River Basin are also not consistently better than wild Snake River return rates, as conventional thinking would assume. The median SAR of four wild Alaskan stocks is slightly lower than the median SAR of three Snake River wild stocks when all years of data are considered. The conclusion is similar for most populations: SARs are poor everywhere, and generally ~1% except in the earliest years of the time series. Thus, the numerical similarity in SARs is not an artifact of some recent event but something that has persisted for many years.[xii]

Even with all these mitigation efforts, what's becoming increasingly evident is that the greatest threat to salmon populations is the impact of climate change on the ocean. 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.[xiii]

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. [xiv]

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,[xv] highlighting the many complex challenges beyond continuing to mitigate the impacts of the hydropower system as we continue our work towards fish recovery. That analysis, titled, "Climate change threatens Chinook salmon throughout their life cycle" by Lisa G. Crozier (NOAA Fisheries), Brian J. Burke (NOAA Fisheries), Brandon E. Chasco (NOAA Fisheries), Daniel L. Widener (Ocean Associates – under contract to NOAA Fisheries) & Richard W. Zabel (NOAA Fisheries); February 18, 2021; states, in part:

> *Previous population models that have used global climate model (GCM) projections have focused on drivers in freshwater life stages only (e.g., stream temperature, winter flooding, and drought). While these are useful for evaluating restoration actions within those contexts, they completely ignore the large impacts of climate change on the marine stage.*
>
> *Nonetheless, negative effects from SST [sea surface temperature] still drove most populations extinct within the century.*
>
> *Climate impacts were most dramatic in the marine stage, where survival was reduced by 83–90%.*

Our analysis showed relative resilience in freshwater stages, with the dominant driver toward extinction being rising SST (sea surface temperature), which tracked a ~90% decline in survival in the marine life stage.

Salmon recovery isn't a Snake River issue or a Columbia River Basin issue, but a coastwide ocean issue.

The Trump Administration

On June 12, 2025, President Trump announced his intention to withdraw from the lopsided and flawed agreement reached between the Biden Administration and the "Six Sovereigns." We welcomed the Trump Administration's acknowledgement that the politicized agreement between the former Administration and only a fraction of impacted sovereign entities and other stakeholders inappropriately devalued hydropower. President Trump's actions righted a wrong, and we at NWRP believe now is the time to come together and chart a sustainable path toward effective solutions that protect salmon and maintain affordable and reliable hydropower needed by millions of people in the Pacific Northwest.

And that includes the ongoing work with the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, the Coeur d'Alene Tribe, and the Spokane Tribe of Indians, by committing an additional $200 million in BPA funds to continue the study of reintroducing salmon above Chief Joseph and Grand Coulee Dams. These dams, unlike other Columbia and Snake River dams, were built without fish passage. Knowing the importance of addressing truly blocked areas, the NWRP board unanimously supported the Phase Two Implementation Plan (P2IP) proposal and looks forward to collaborating with the Upper Basin Tribes on its implementation. We applaud the Trump Administration's efforts to continue implementing this common-sense proposal, which demonstrates that salmon recovery and our hydroelectric system can share our rivers.

Challenges Ahead

While the June 12 memo by President Trump addressed the most disturbing, near-term threats to the system, pro-breach advocates came closer than they have before to getting senior policymakers to adopt a pro-breach agenda. Unfortunately, they show no signs of giving up now. Their ongoing efforts include:

- A re-defining of recovery goals – this includes the unsigned NOAA "Rebuilding Report," where the U.S. Government essentially handed the pen to the plaintiffs in writing the "science" that is now being used as the predicate for dam removal

- The adoption of anti-dam policies by the States of Oregon and Washington

- Continued forum shopping and creation to advance their pro-breach agenda

- And attempts at using the regulatory process to blame warming river temperatures on the existing hydro infrastructure, despite federal science that suggests the opposite

In the face of these ongoing and real threats to the system, Representative Newhouse introduced H.R. 2073, the "Defending Our Dams Act," which would effectively halt any federal investment and efforts to remove the LSRD. Pacific Northwest ratepayers have no greater ally and champion than Representative Newhouse, and his continued advocacy for protecting our essential hydro assets is just one of the reasons.

We are also grateful for the active and unwavering support from the cosponsors of this legislation – Congressmen Bentz, Fulcher, and Baumgartner.

NWRP is committed to salmon recovery and engaging in dialogue with the "Six Sovereigns" and numerous other regional sovereign entities to develop recovery strategies. However, our lesson from the Biden Administration is that unless we have firmer protections in place, there are those, even within our own government, who would undermine our region's energy needs, food production, regional water supplies, river transportation system, and the communities that depend on them. That is why NWRP supports H.R. 2073, as we need the protection afforded to us with its adoption. We would urge and appreciate your support for the "Defending Our Dams Act."

Dam Removal – Not a Slam Dunk for Salmon Recovery and Not Without Consequences

As mentioned, in 2022, BPA commissioned the "BPA Lower Snake River Dams Power Replacement Study," which examined the costs associated with replacing the Lower Snake River dams. This study reached several significant conclusions, including:

> *"Even in a best-case scenario, replacement power would cost several times as much as the lower Snake River dams costs. This is driven by both energy replacement as well as replacement of firm capacity and operational flexibility. The firm capacity value is a significant driver of replacements costs."*

Senator Murray and Governor Inslee of Washington issued a report in 2022 that reached a similar conclusion when it stated, "*Replacing the characteristics of energy provided by hydropower, however, requires energy technologies that must continue to be developed.*"

But we know that plaintiffs intend to ignore these conclusions and pursue dam breaching anyway. We know this because they have said so publicly. Amanda Goodin, a supervising senior attorney with Earthjustice, a lead plaintiff in the litigation, was quoted in a December 1, 2023 press article saying she "disagreed that new technologies will be needed." And we know just how dangerous this would be if they were successful.

The Fifth National Climate Assessment, released by the Biden Administration, noted that in 2020, record-breaking heat and widespread drought contributed to concurrent destructive wildfires across California, Oregon, and Washington, exposing millions to health hazards and straining firefighting resources. The ongoing drought exacerbated a record-breaking Pacific Northwest heatwave in June 2021, which was made 2° to 4°F hotter by climate change. The heatwave led to more than 1,400 heat-related deaths, another severe wildfire season, mass die-offs of fishery species important to the region's economy and Indigenous communities, and total damages exceeding $38.5 billion (in 2022 dollars).

Our members and the market we operate in are governed by state laws in California, Nevada, Oregon, and Washington, among others. These policies related to GHG emissions are having profound impacts on reliability, affordability, and our ability to meet climate policy objectives.

Analysis performed by Energy GPS on behalf of NWRP in 2022 indicated that even if the build rate of currently available renewable technologies (solar, wind, and batteries) within the Western Power Pool were doubled, the region would not meet the mandated emissions objectives until 2076 ***with*** the LSRD in place.

Furthermore, energy analyses across the nation and region have indicated a surge in load growth in the future, with not enough energy to match the need. In 2025, the Pacific Northwest Utilities Conference Committee projected that electric usage in the Pacific Northwest could grow more than 30% during the next 10 years.[xvi] In late 2024, the Western Electric Coordinating Council projected that reliability hours at risk could increase by nearly 100 times current levels, based on recent trends in energy infrastructure completion.[xvii] Ironically, both of these analyses were conducted assuming the Columbia and Snake River dams were fully operational.

Conclusion

Already in the 119th Congress, the House Committee on Natural Resources has advanced bipartisan legislation that helps the country and the Pacific Northwest meet some of the challenges we confront head-on. On behalf of the millions of people we represent, NWRP urges the Committee to view H.R. 2073 the same way and pass this legislation so we can focus on what we really need to do to recover salmon while maintaining our regional economy.

Thank you, Chair Hageman, Ranking Member Hoyle, the Committee, and Rep. Newhouse for inviting me to testify today. I'm happy to take any questions.

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[i] https://www.nerc.com/pa/RAPA/ra/Reliability%20Assessments%20DL/NERC_SRA_2023.pdf

[ii] BPA Presse Release: "Lower Snake River dams help region power through recent heatwave, Ice Harbor key to relieving transmission congestion in Tri-Cities" July 22, 2021: News Release Template (bpa.gov)

[iii] https://nwriverpartners.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/EGPSC_LSRD-Power-Cost-Replacement-Study_6_29_2022_Final_1223.pdf

[iv] https://www.bpa.gov/-/media/Aep/power/hydropower-data-studies/e3-bpa-lower-snake-river-dams-power-replacement-study.pdf
[v] "Columbia Snake River System Facts"; Pacific Northwest Waterways Association; 2023
[vi] Letter to Senator Patty Murray & Governor Jay Inslee from Lewis Clark Terminal, June 23, 2022
[vii] "Yakama, Lummi tribal leaders call for removal of three lower Columbia River dams," by Lynda Mapes, *The Seattle Times*, Oct. 14, 2019
[viii] "The Whole Dam Story: A 100-year perspective on salmon and dams co-existing in the Columbia River Basin. Bonneville Power Administration Version 04212016
[ix] Columbia River Dart (Columbia Basin Research, School of Aquatic & Fishery Sciences; University of Washington)
[x] https://www.capitalpress.com/ag_sectors/grains/amid-a-battle-over-snake-river-dams-a-look-at-how-the-salmon-are-doing/article_c76c740a-dadd-11ed-ad18-9fb96a214c52.html
[xi] A synthesis of the coast-wide decline in survival of West Coast Chinook Salmon (Oncorhynchus tshawytscha, Salmonidae) - Welch - 2021 - Fish and Fisheries - Wiley Online Library
[xii] A synthesis of the coast-wide decline in survival of West Coast Chinook Salmon (Oncorhynchus tshawytscha, Salmonidae) - Welch - 2021 - Fish and Fisheries - Wiley Online Library
[xiii] https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/sites/3/2022/03/01_SROCC_SPM_FINAL.pdf
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[xv] "Climate change threatens Chinook salmon throughout their lifecycle," by Lisa Crozier, Brian Burke, Brandon Chasco, Daniel Widener, Richard Zabel; published February 18, 2021
[xvi] https://www.pnucc.org/wp-content/uploads/PNUCC-2025-Forecast-Announcement-final.pdf
[xvii] https://feature.wecc.org/wara/