

**DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY, CORPS OF ENGINEERS**

**COMPLETE STATEMENT OF**

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**BEFORE**

**COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES**  
**SUBCOMMITTEE ON WATER, WILDLIFE AND FISHERIES**  
**UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**  
**ON**

**JUNE 26, 2023**

Good Afternoon,

Thank you for the invitation to testify today. I am the Programs Director for the Northwestern Division of the United States Army Corps of Engineers (Corps). The Northwestern Division oversees five districts: Seattle, Portland, Walla Walla, Kansas City, and Omaha. This large geographic expanse includes the Columbia and Missouri River basins and their tributaries as well as the Coast of Oregon and Washington and Puget Sound.

The Northwestern Division manages its districts' Civil Works activities based on river basins rather than state boundaries. Its primary Civil Works missions are flood and storm damage reduction, commercial navigation, and aquatic ecosystem restoration. The Northwestern Division maintains and operates multiple purpose dams that also provide benefits such as hydropower, water supply storage, and recreation. The dams also have modifications and operational changes to protect and mitigate the impacts of the system's construction and continued operation on fish and wildlife. Within its jurisdiction are 77 dams and reservoirs, 29 hydropower plants, and 1,600 miles of navigable channels.

The Congress authorized the Corps and the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) to construct, operate, and maintain 14 Columbia River System projects for multiple specified purposes. The Congress authorized the Bonneville Power Administration to market and transmit the power generated by the coordinated system operations of these projects.

Within the Columbia River System, the Corps constructed, and operates and maintains, four dams on the lower Snake River. These are multiple-use facilities, whose purposes include but are not limited to navigation and hydropower production. Fish ladders have been in place at these facilities since the dams were built in the 1960s and early 1970s. Fish passage improvements – both structural and operational changes – have been made at all four dams over the last 25 years as the Corps investigates and adopts new technologies to avoid jeopardy to the continued existence of juvenile and adult fish pursuant to our obligations under the Endangered Species Act. Even with significant investment, operations, and engineering to support improved fish passage, the construction and continued operation of the Federal Columbia River Hydropower System, coupled with other factors, negatively affects native fish abundance, and the communities, including Tribal Nations, that rely on those fisheries for economic, cultural, and ecosystem benefits.

With appropriate maintenance, repair, rehabilitation, and replacement of components as needed, the Corps could continue to operate these four dams on the lower Snake River for many years. Deauthorization and removal of the dams would require specific authorization and appropriations from Congress.

Management of the system has been the subject of litigation for the past two decades, which resulted in the latest National Environmental Policy Act evaluation of the system

and the latest biological opinions from the National Marine Fisheries Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, completed in September 2020.

In late 2020 and early 2021, plaintiffs filed complaints in the district court in Oregon and the Ninth Circuit challenging the decisions of the Corps, Reclamation, Bonneville Power Administration, the National Marine Fisheries Service, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The United States negotiated a stay of the district court litigation so that the parties could work collaboratively on addressing basin-wide solutions that could resolve the litigation. The District Court granted the stay in October of 2021, and then extended the stay through August of this year. The stay that these parties negotiated has allowed the parties in the litigation and the regional sovereigns, which includes the region's tribes and four states, to continue to work on developing comprehensive, basin-wide solutions to recover native fish populations. Under the court ordered stay, the USACE and other affected Departments and agencies are participating in confidential mediation conducted by the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service to achieve this goal. The Corps is committed to the confidential mediation and a whole-of-government approach to addressing these important matters.

In summary, Congress has authorized the Corps to operate the lower Snake River facilities, and many others in the Northwest, for multiple purposes. The Columbia Basin is a complex system, and the Corps, working in partnership with the other federal agencies, the tribes, states, and stakeholders, will continue to focus on providing innovative solutions to the issues facing the Columbia River Basin, including actions to protect and enhance both communities and ecosystems, consistent with the congressionally authorized purposes.

Once again, thank you for the invitation to testify before you today.