

Agenda for Action

The Snake River is our best opportunity anywhere on the West Coast to increase salmon abundance for orcas and also sport, commercial, and tribal fisheries. This mighty river historically provided nearly 50% of all salmon from the Columbia Basin. And, because of 5,500 miles of excellent habitat on the rivers and streams above the four lower Snake River dams, it provides the Northwest's best chance for restoring abundant wild salmon and steelhead runs.

Getting Prepared for Dam Removal The Orca Recovery Task Force and Governor Inslee recommended a stakeholder process, including consultation with relevant tribes and communities, to identify issues and solutions associated with removing the four lower Snake River dams. A stakeholder process is a smart action for Washington State that would not duplicate work being done by federal agencies for the EIS process (see below.) It would mean that Washington State is ready to move forward expeditiously with dam removal, knowing what needs to be done to keep potentially impacted communities whole.

Higher Spill Provides Near-Term Help The states of Washington, Oregon, the Nez Perce Tribe and federal agencies reached agreement in December 2018 to increase "spill" -- water over the dams to aid downstream migration of young salmon and steelhead. This is a positive step forward that helps salmon while we work to remove the dams. To implement this, Washington must modify its "dissolved gas standard" -- a key measure of "spill" -- to 120% in 2019. Then both Washington and Oregon need to modify their dissolved gas standards to increase spill levels to 125% starting in 2020. Scientists say that these higher "spill" levels will be critical at remaining dams, even if the four lower Snake River dams are removed.

Northwest Power and Conservation Council (NWPPC) Fish and Wildlife Plan The NWPPC is updating its Fish and Wildlife Plan in 2019. This plan sets priorities for Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) investments in salmon recovery. The draft plan will be out in July of this year followed by public comment period and hearings in all four Northwest states. This is an important opportunity to push for stronger recovery standards for salmon runs, and to advocate for removing the lower Snake River dams. BPA is one of the federal agencies engaged in the EIS process (below.)

Federal Agencies Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Process In May of 2016, the federal district court ruled that the federal Biological Opinion -- the recovery plan for endangered Snake River salmon -- was inadequate and did not meet the requirements of law. The judge ordered the agencies to prepare a new EIS that evaluated stronger salmon recovery measures, including potential removal of the lower Snake River dams. The draft EIS is due out in February 2020 with public comment period and hearings to follow. The final EIS will direct federal agency actions for endangered salmon and steelhead going forward, including whether or not to remove the four lower Snake River dams.

It's time to rebalance the salmon and dams equation.

SNAKE RIVER RESTORATION CAMPAIGN

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Salmon near extinction. Orcas starving. Restore the Snake River and its abundant habitat.

NEARLY 50% of all the salmon in the Columbia River Basin used to come from the Snake River and its tributaries.

Snake River habitats in Idaho and eastern Washington and Oregon are ideal abundant for salmon and steelhead. The habitats are still there: 5,500 miles of cool clear streams, many in protected wilderness areas.

Loss of salmon habitat is not the problem in the Snake River Basin. The dams are. Removing them is the single biggest opportunity to restore salmon in the Northwest.

Scientific Consensus is Irrefutable

In a letter to Governor Inslee's Orca Task Force the largest-ever group of Northwest fisheries scientists and professionals, thirty-three in all, forcefully state that dam removal will benefit salmon and orcas:

"Removing the four federal dams on the lower Snake River and restoring the ecological health of that river corridor... is the single largest step we can take to increase salmon abundance for orcas at critical times of the year."

The scientists also concluded that dam removal combined with more "spill" -- water spilled over dams at remaining dams -- is the optimal action to take.



Times have changed. The Northwest no longer needs the four Lower Snake River dams.

MYTH: We need their hydropower

Fact: They Produce Low-Value Hydropower Which Can Be Replaced with Renewables

Hydropower from the four lower Snake River dams is now less valuable than ever. These dams produce power mostly in the spring when hydropower is abundant, and often sold as excess power to California.

The four lower Snake River dams together generate about 4% of Northwest electricity. This modest contribution can be cost-effectively replaced as documented by an in-depth technical analysis, Lower Snake River Dams Power Replacement Study.²

The respected independent energy firm, Energy Strategies, studied multiple scenarios and found:

- “The region can remove the four Lower Snake River Dams and replace the power they provide with a portfolio of conservation and renewable energy resources while maintaining grid and transmission reliability at levels equal to or better than the current system and with little or no increase in greenhouse gas emissions.”²
- California’s demand for excess NW hydropower has shrunk over time as wind generation, solar power, and energy conservation have come online at costs that are competitive (lower even) than NW hydropower. The value of excess power from Snake River dams is at an all time low.
 - The lower Snake River dams’ hydropower turbines are now 40+ years old and need extensive maintenance and upgrades in the next decades that will cost the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) over a billion. These looming costs risk BPAs competitiveness, risk rate increases in the Northwest, and don’t make sense given today’s lower cost of renewable energy and energy conservation.



MYTH: We need them for shipping

Fact: River Shipping Has Declined 70%

Barge navigation through the lower Snake River to ship grain and other agricultural commodities was once a primary purpose for the dams. However in the past 20 years that has changed:

- Freight volume through the Lower Snake River corridor has declined by 70%; grain volume has declined 45% in favor of shipping by rail.³
- The Port of Lewiston does not break even and still requires local taxpayers to subsidize it.³ Ending this would be an economic benefit to taxpayers.
- The Northwest can choose to make smart investments in expanded rail to serve shipping needs and keep communities whole.
- The locks that allow passage through the lower Snake River dams are now 40+ years-old and need extensive maintenance and re-building, which does not make economic sense given limited demand for river shipping.

MYTH: We need them for irrigation

Fact: These Dams Provide Minimal Irrigation

Only one of the four reservoirs provides water for irrigation, and for only a few irrigators.

- There are reasonable solutions to keep these irrigators whole without the dams, such as adjusting intake pipes to pump water from river level rather than reservoir level. The Northwest could also choose to subsidize this modestly higher expense.

MYTH: They provide flood control

Fact: These Dams Provide No Flood Control

The lower Snake River dams are all “run-of-river” dams not designed for flood control.

- Many dams in the Columbia River Basin provide important flood control, especially for Portland, OR. But not these four dams. They weren’t designed for it.

PHOTOS:

Front (clockwise): Chinook salmon; Southern Resident orca; salmon habitat in central Idaho; salmon drying racks; rafting and fishing the Middle Fork Salmon River.

Left: Lower Monumental Dam, one of four lower Snake River dams the Northwest no longer needs; (inset far left) eastern Oregon wind turbines; (inset near left) Free the Snake Flotilla, 2018.

REFERENCES:

1. Letter of August 27, 2018 to Governor Inslee, Co-Chairs Solien and Purce, and Members of the Southern Resident Orca Task Force; authored by David R. Montgomery, Ph.D., and thirty-two other fisheries scientists and professionals with extensive fisheries work and research in Washington, Oregon, and Idaho.
2. Lower Snake River Dams Power Replacement Study, April 2018; commissioned by the NW Energy Coalition and conducted by Energy Strategies, an independent consulting firm whose clients include power producers, transmission developers, utilities, and government agencies. For more information visit NWEnergy.org/LSRDStudy
3. Comments to Members of the Southern Resident Orca Task Force, August 21, 2018; RE: Freight Transportation on the Lower Snake River; submitted by Linwood Laughy, Moscow, Idaho

MYTH: We need them for our economy

Fact: The Economy Will See Many Benefits from Removing These Dams

- Restoring Snake River salmon runs will be a huge boost to sport, commercial, and tribal fishing economies that once were a mainstay of the Northwest.
- Replacing Snake River hydropower with modern solar and wind generation, energy efficiency, and demand-response technologies will diversify and update the Northwest’s energy portfolio and create good jobs. Both are positives for the Northwest.
- Smart investments to address localized impacts of dam removal – such as added rail capacity for grain shipping and riverfront improvements in Clarkston WA, Lewiston ID, and other communities – can leave impacted towns better positioned for the future.

SRRC2019.1

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