The Salmon Communities’ View of the CRSO DEIS:


I. Background:
On Feb. 28, the US Army Corps of Engineers, Bureau of Reclamation, and Bonneville Power Administration released a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) that considers options for future management of federal dams in the Columbia Basin. The analysis had been ordered by the U.S. District Court in Portland in 2016 when it invalidated the agencies’ latest salmon for the Columbia Basin. This 8,000 page document reviews five salmon recovery alternatives, including one that would restore the lower Snake River by removing its four federal dams there. The DEIS’ Preferred Alternative, however, rejects this option in favor of spilling slightly more water over eight dams on the Snake and Columbia rivers.

This DEIS follows five previous management plans that have been rejected by courts as inadequate and illegal for meeting conservation goals. Stakeholders across the region are eager to avoid further litigation and wary of an EIS process that can’t deliver the comprehensive solutions that Northwest salmon and people need today.

A 45-day comment period for public input on the DEIS is open and will end April 13, 2020. Federal agencies have scheduled a series of public meetings in March at locations around the Northwest. A Final EIS is expected in June with adoption of a new plan by September.

II. The DEIS does not deliver the comprehensive solution that Snake River salmon and Northwest communities require

The federal agencies that produced this DEIS do not have the missions or authorities to recommend or implement the type of comprehensive solution that Northwest communities need today. The DEIS is focused, for example, only on preventing extinction, when leaders and residents across the region are calling for the restoration of abundant and harvestable salmon and steelhead populations. And even this insufficient goal to at best prevent extinction is unmet by the DEIS’ endorsement of the flexible spill agreement that is already in place today.

Independent scientific analyses have determined that current spill levels will not reverse the ongoing decline of endangered salmon and steelhead populations.

An effective solution for Northwest salmon and people must move beyond historic conflicts and proactively address four urgent, connected issues. A long-term plan must:
1. Restore abundant, fishable salmon and steelhead populations in the Columbia Basin
2. Protect and invest in the economic vitality of local farming and fishing communities
3. Continue the region’s legacy of providing reliable, affordable, clean energy, and,
4. Honor our longstanding commitments to Native American Tribes and their cultures.

III. How the DEIS fails – some specifics:

- **It pits healthy salmon against clean, affordable energy:** The DEIS presents a false choice between maintaining affordable utility bills and restoring healthy salmon and steelhead. It inexplicably overstates the cost of replacing power from the Snake River dams with clean energy, and even suggests the possibility of replacing their power with fossil fuels, a step we know is unnecessary.

- **It ignores salmon and orca science:** The DEIS downplays the best scientific information which shows that restoring the lower Snake River will provide the biggest available boost to increase salmon and steelhead runs, and it dismisses the benefits of increasing those runs for endangered orcas and struggling fishing communities.

- **It fails to protect salmon:** The DEIS fails to acknowledge its insufficient survival benefits for salmon and steelhead that will result from its recommended action (‘flexible spill’ at lower Columbia and Snake river dams), and the fact that any potentially new benefits will be eroded by climate impacts—something river restoration can help mitigate.

- **It ignores the benefits and opportunities of salmon recovery for communities:** The DEIS focuses on the financial costs of salmon recovery, ignores the long-standing sacrifices by and costs to rural communities and Tribes in terms of lost fishing opportunity, reduced jobs and incomes, and other socio-economic impacts due to river/dam operations that have consistently failed to protect/restore salmon and steelhead. Further, the DEIS ignores the economic benefits of salmon recovery and the investments and jobs that river restoration activities would generate for communities up and down the Snake and Columbia Rivers.

- **It also ignores avoided costs and future savings by restoring the lower Snake River:** The DEIS ignores a stream of avoided costs based on savings of more than $1 billion by eliminating the rising capital, operations and maintenance costs for the four Snake River dams.

IV. Northwest policymakers, stakeholders, sovereigns and citizens must work together to craft a solution to meet the needs of salmon and communities

- People across the region are calling for change that brings communities together—rather than pitting them against one another. Strong leadership can help us solve each other’s challenges.
• We must honor our treaty commitments with the Nez Perce, Umatilla, Warm Springs, and Yakama tribes.
• Several leaders, including Governor Inslee and Governor Brown, are stepping up, supporting efforts to reimagine how we manage the Lower Snake River.
• Gov. Inslee’s Stakeholder Engagement Process showed that people are ready to leave old divides behind.
• We need more political leadership that will capture this momentum and move us forward.
• The science is clear. Removing the four Lower Snake River dams could bring back million-strong salmon runs, benefitting sport, commercial and tribal fishing communities and helping starving orcas.
• We can ensure both farming and fishing communities have a prosperous future.
• A careful investment package, including funding for dam removal, and smart planning would restore abundant salmon and provide the region with reliable, affordable, clean power.

For further information, please contact: