



FOR REPORTERS: Background information for NEPA public scoping meetings, Oct.-Dec. 2016

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Hearings to Examine Value and Impact of Northwest Hydro Dams Set to Begin *Public meetings run until end of 2016 across four states*

Starting next week, federal agencies will hold a series of public meetings about the federal hydropower dams on the Columbia and Snake rivers. The purpose is to hear from Northwest residents about dam operations, benefits, and the dams' impact on air, water, land and wildlife, including endangered salmon.

In a May 2016 ruling, U.S. District Judge Michael Simon requested the agencies to review all reasonable options for achieving the goals of the hydrosystem (power generation, flood control, navigation, irrigation, recreation), in order to minimize the system's negative impacts. The first step in this three-year review process are 15 public "scoping" meetings across the region—also called NEPA meetings, after the National Environmental Policy Act.

If you cover meetings in your area, the Fast Facts below can help. Terry Flores of Northwest RiverPartners (contact info above) is also available for interviews about the dams' impact on the environment and the economy.

Fast Facts: NEPA meetings

- **When, where?** [Through December 2016](#) in Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Montana.
- **Who's in charge?** Bonneville Power Administration (BPA), U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and Bureau of Reclamation.
- **What will happen?** The format is "workshop-style," with information stations staffed by subject matter experts from the federal agencies, and opportunities to submit written comments.
- **Can people speak?** A stenographer will be available to record oral comments (3-minute limit).
- **What happens to comments?** They will influence the scope of the agencies' review of the hydrosystem, called an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).
- **What happens next?** A draft EIS is scheduled to be published for public comment in March 2020.

Fast Facts: The Columbia-Snake River Hydropower System

Northwest hydropower is the region's largest source of carbon-free, renewable electricity

- Nearly 60% of the energy produced in Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Montana is generated by hydropower dams on the Columbia and Snake rivers (Energy Information Administration).
- The next largest contributors to the region's power mix each contribute only a quarter of that amount (coal—16 %, natural gas—11 %) (EIA).
- The majority (90%) of the Northwest's renewable energy comes from hydropower dams, which generate carbon-free electricity without releasing measurable amounts of methane.

Hydropower backs up other renewables; wind/solar cannot replace hydro generation

- Hydropower is a vital partner for other renewables that allows them to be integrated into the power grid.

- Hydropower cannot be replaced by wind or solar because they are intermittent resources and the technology doesn't yet exist to store them.
- The Northwest can use more wind and solar than other parts of the country because hydropower is always available to back up these less-constant energy sources.
- Wind and solar power alone, because they operate intermittently, cannot replace the always-available hydropower produced by dams.

The federal hydrosystem helps fuel the region's economy

- Dams make the rivers navigable for barges that move Northwest products to port.
- The Columbia-Snake River System supports the movement of more than 42 million tons of commercial cargo, valued at over \$20 billion, every year.
- The Columbia-Snake River System is the nation's top wheat export gateway. Nearly ten percent of all U.S. wheat exports move through the lower Snake River dams.
- Low-cost hydropower keeps traditional jobs in the Northwest, including those at Boeing, wood and chemical companies and aluminum manufacturers, and has helped attract newer employers such as Intel, Google, Facebook, Amazon and BMW.

Salmon and dams are co-existing and thriving

- New salmon friendly technologies, such as fish slides, bypass systems, and fish-friendly turbines, have vastly improved survival of salmon through the dams.
- Now, overall survival of young salmon through the hydrosystem is akin to that in free-flowing rivers with no dams, according to NOAA Fisheries.
 - An average 97% of young salmon make it past each of the eight large federal dams, and on to the Pacific, according to BPA:

▪ Ice Harbor: 96.1 %	▪ McNary: 96.2%
▪ Lower Granite: 97.5%	▪ John Day: 96.7%
▪ Lower Monumental: 98.7%	▪ The Dalles: 96%
▪ Little Goose: 98.2%	▪ Bonneville: 95.9%
- A \$1 billion program to restore habitat in the Columbia Basin has improved salmon nurseries and spawning habitat.
- All Columbia and Snake river dams are equipped with ladders and other safe passageways for returning adult salmon.
- A new record of more than 2.5 million returning adults was set in 2014, the most since Bonneville Dam was built.

Fast Facts: Snake River dams

The Snake Dams keep millions of tons of carbon dioxide out of our skies annually

- The four dams on the lower Snake River generate over 1,000 average megawatts of energy annually—enough for over 800,000 average U.S. homes—with no carbon emissions.¹
- It would take three coal-fired or six gas-fired power plants to replace the power produced by the Snake Dams, according to the Northwest Power and Conservation Council (NWPPCC).²
- Removing the Snake Dams would mean adding 3 to 4 million metric tons of carbon dioxide to Northwest skies each year (NWPPCC).
- That figure doesn't include the increased CO2 emissions from the additional 43,610 railcars, or more than 167,000 semi-trucks, that would be needed to replace barges on the Lower Snake.

Dam and lock system fuels agriculture and the economy

- In 2014, the most recent year for which data is available, barges carrying 4.4 million tons of Northwest wheat and other cargo passed through the federal locks at the Snake Dams, according

¹ <https://www.bpa.gov/news/pubs/FactSheets/fs-201603-A-Northwest-energy-solution-Regional-power-benefits-of-the-lower-Snake-River-dams.pdf>

² Northwest Power and Conservation Council, Sixth Power Plan

to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

- This continues an upward trend in the amount of goods barged on the Lower Snake, from 2012 (3.3 million tons) to 2013 (3.7 million tons) to 2014 (4.4 million tons).

New technologies enhance salmon protection

- Snake River natural-origin salmon species have been trending upward, even in years with poor ocean conditions. This includes Snake River sockeye who were all but extinct in the late 1990s.
- The Snake Dams are equipped with ladders for returning adult salmon that allow the fish to swim upriver to reach their spawning grounds.
- For young salmon on their way to the ocean, advanced technologies allow most fish to safely migrate past each of the four Snake Dams. The survival rates for yearling Chinook at the dams are high and similar to rates found in undammed rivers, according to BPA:
 - Ice Harbor: 96.1 %
 - Lower Granite: 97.5%
 - Lower Monumental: 98.7%
 - Little Goose: 98.2%

Claims that the dams should be removed to help Puget Sound whales are unfounded

- **Dam breaching not necessary for orca recovery:** As stated in NOAA Fisheries' 2016 Southern Resident Killer Whale Fact Sheet:³ "Neither opinion [2008 and 2014 Biological Opinions], nor the NOAA Recovery Plans that NOAA Fisheries has developed for individual salmon species and stocks, concluded that breaching the dams is necessary for recovery of Snake River salmon or Southern Resident killer whales."
- **The dams are not depleting food for orcas:** "The biological opinions concluded that hatchery production of salmon and steelhead in the Columbia and Snake systems more than offsets any losses of salmon from the killer whale prey base caused by the dams," according to NOAA.

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Northwest RiverPartners is an alliance of farmers, utilities, ports and businesses that promote the economic and environmental benefits of the Columbia and Snake rivers and salmon recovery policies based on sound science. More at nwrp.org.

³ http://www.westcoast.fisheries.noaa.gov/publications/protected_species/marine_mammals/killer_whales/4.11.2016_srkw_factsheet.pdf