

In Response to Governor Inslee's Lower Snake River Dams Draft Report

Draft Report Shows Complexities, Dangers of Dam Breaching

Vancouver, WA, December 20, 2019 – The draft report on the Lower Snake River Dams Stakeholder Process has been released, revealing complex issues and highly diverse opinions about the importance of the four lower Snake River dams (LSRDs) as part of the region's clean energy future. Northwest RiverPartners (NWRP) was one of the stakeholders interviewed as part of the study.

Northwest RiverPartners is a not-for-profit organization that advocates for the benefits of carbon-free hydroelectricity on behalf of community-owned utilities, ports, and businesses. The organization's values include finding equitable solutions to the climate crisis and using verified science to back policy decisions, including those aimed at restoring salmon.

"The draft report shows many perspectives, but it remains clear that the four lower Snake River Dams are critical to the region's ability to achieve a clean energy future without the hardships of blackouts," said Kurt Miller, NWRP executive director. "Our communities--and especially our disadvantaged communities--simply cannot afford regional blackouts and spiking energy prices,"

The stakeholder input was compiled by a combination of four consulting firms. Their report does not serve as a policy recommendation.

During the process, NWRP shared its concerns about projected region-wide electricity shortages and the special significance of the lower Snake River dams to Tri-Cities, WA, and surrounding areas. The Tri-Cities of Kennewick, Pasco, and Richland are home to a growing population of almost 300,000, of which over one-third are communities of color.

"We are pleased that NWRP was able to lend its voice to this process as a stakeholder and share our views on the key importance dams play in helping to reverse the negative effects of climate change on oceans and rivers. These are fundamental issues that must be addressed if we are to recover our iconic orcas and salmon," said Miller.

NWRP underscored how the LSRDs help the region safely add other renewables. The intermittency of wind and solar power requires a back-up that can adjust to their fluctuations on a second-to-second basis. Hydroelectric dams fulfill this requirement by holding back water and then releasing it past turbines as needed.

In addition, NWRP provided a critique of a recent [ECONorthwest analysis](#) that suggested there was a potential monetary benefit to dam breaching. Most notably, NWRP pointed out that in its analysis ECONorthwest stated there was "extreme uncertainty" regarding whether dam breaching would help recover endangered fish populations.

Significantly, the Washington Lower Snake River Dams Stakeholder Process draft report did not provide any new scientific findings that would credibly devalue the role of the LSRDs.

“Often, policy discussions like these can ignore the practical impacts on vulnerable communities and on critical infrastructure,” Miller said. “We were excited to be able to introduce these topics into the conversation.”

Consistent with these goals, NWRP will submit a third party analytical critique from energy consulting leader, Energy GPS. The critique will examine the strengths and weaknesses of the April 2018 study commissioned by the Northwest Energy Coalition (NWECC) and performed by Energy Strategies. The NWECC-commissioned report purports to show that the LSRDs can be easily and affordably replaced by wind generation in Montana.

The Energy GPS critique will demonstrate that the NWECC study was thorough but is based on questionable and dated assumptions that cast doubts on its conclusions in light of recently announced coal generation retirements.

It is noteworthy that Energy Strategies has updated many of its assumptions in a more recent analysis performed on behalf of Oregon, Washington, and several clean energy providers.

Subsequent to the Washington draft report, three workshops will be held in Clarkston, the Tri-Cities, and Vancouver, where the public can listen to a presentation and panel discussion to better understand the issues. Written comments will be accepted through the 24th of January. A [survey](#) is also available to Washington residents now through 5:00 PM on the 24th of January.

The pivotal release of the [Draft Columbia River System Operations Environmental Impact Statement](#) by the federal action agencies is due in February 2020. This report will analyze the societal, environmental, and economic costs and benefits of breaching the four lower Snake River dams.

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About Northwest RiverPartners

Northwest RiverPartners (NWRP) is a not-for-profit, member-driven organization. We represent most of the not-for-profit, community-owned utilities in the Northwest. We also represent regional ports and businesses. NWRP is focused on raising awareness about how the Northwest’s hydropower system betters communities and the natural environment and encourages science-based solutions that help hydropower and salmon coexist and thrive.

<http://nwrivernpartners.org>