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River advocates urge involvement as federal agencies release environmental review of Columbia River System Operations

Diverse perspective needed during 45-day comment period

PORTLAND, Ore. -- The Pacific Northwest's progressive balance of economy and environment hangs in the balance with today's release of the Columbia River System Operations draft environmental impact statement. The [Pacific Northwest Waterways Association](https://www.pnwa.net) encourages people to share their views on clean energy, freight efficiencies, salmon recovery and climate change during the public comment period, which ends April 13.

The draft EIS documents the evaluation of the long-term effects of the operation, maintenance, and configuration of the 14 federal dam and reservoir projects that comprise the federal Columbia River System. It is the culmination of nearly four years of analysis by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Bureau of Reclamation and Bonneville Power Administration. Their operation of the dams and locks on the Columbia and Snake rivers enable the Northwest's supply of clean hydroelectric power and ability to barge goods from the nation's most inland port in Lewiston, Idaho, to locations throughout the Northwest and abroad.

"The Columbia River System is the lifeblood of our region," said PNWA Executive Director Kristin Meira. "It supports tens of thousands of families, moves our foods, raw materials, fuels and more, provides us with 90% of our renewable energy, prevents flooding, and represents innumerable cultural and recreational opportunities."

The federal agencies identify their preferred alternative in the draft EIS. The preferred alternative focuses on benefiting fish recovery using water management measures while balancing the need for hydropower production and water supply. The preferred alternative does not include dam breaching measures.

"PNWA appreciates the federal agencies' approach to developing a preferred alternative that balances the many uses and resources of our river system," said Meira. "We also appreciate that dam breaching is avoided as an extreme measure that would have very negative consequences to our Northwest communities and little benefit to fish recovery."

Loss of barging would impact climate, fragile economies

PNWA commissioned an [independent evaluation](#) in December 2019 that found that removal of barging by breaching the Lower Snake River dams would cost the U.S. \$4 billion over the next 30 years. Removal of barging as a highly efficient mode of transportation would also lead to a significant increase in carbon emissions that would contribute to climate change and jeopardize health, safety and livelihoods in already economically fragile local and regional economies.

Some advocacy groups have called for breaching the Lower Snake River dams as a way to increase salmon recovery. PNWA highlights [federal data](#) showing the dams in the system have world-class fish passage facilities that see over 95% of salmon pass each of the dams on their journeys up- and downriver. Although salmon populations face other challenges, removing the Lower Snake River dams would have marginal salmon recovery benefits at significant cost to the region.

"Breaching the Lower Snake River dams is not an option for maintaining balance in a system that powers our homes and businesses and feeds our communities in so many ways," said Meira. "We urge everyone who believes we can have both healthy rivers and healthy communities to share their perspectives during the draft EIS process."

Today's release of the draft EIS kicks off a 45-day comment period, during which anyone interested in the evaluation, its findings, and the preferred alternative can submit their input for consideration and inclusion in the final EIS. The comment period ends April 13.

"We need all voices to be heard, as the outcome of this EIS impacts us all," said Meira. "If you want

to keep jobs, reduce the risk of climate change, keep growing our economy, and protect our environment, this is your chance to get involved. It's critical to our region's future."

To review the draft EIS and provide your comments, visit the Columbia River System Operations Web page at <https://www.nwd.usace.army.mil/CRSO/>.

For more information on the clean energy, efficient transportation, farm irrigation, fish passage and other benefits of the Columbia-Snake River System, visit www.pnwa.net/rivervalues.

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The Pacific Northwest Waterways Association is a non-profit, non-partisan trade association of ports, businesses, public agencies and individuals who support navigation, energy, trade and economic development throughout the region. Learn more at www.pnwa.net.