



PACIFIC NORTHWEST WATERWAYS ASSOCIATION

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PNWA: Federal agencies release final environmental review of Columbia River System Operations – new plan balances environmental protections, human uses

PORTLAND, Ore. – The Columbia River System Operations final environmental impact statement was released today, signaling the completion of a new plan to meet the needs of both the Northwest economy and environment. The final EIS is the culmination of a multi-year process carried by career staff in collaboration with leading experts in fish biology, energy management and socioeconomics.

The EIS covers 14 Corps of Engineers and Bureau of Reclamation dams in the region, and addresses the operation of those projects for hydropower, navigation, irrigation, flood risk management, recreation, and municipal and industrial water supply while also providing important benefits for the ongoing recovery of endangered species like salmon. This EIS involved more than three years of regional collaboration between the Corps, Bureau of Reclamation, Bonneville Power Administration, other federal agencies, numerous Tribes, and the states of Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Montana.

The National Environmental Policy Act process that guided development of the EIS also included several opportunities for agencies, advocacy groups, and the public to review extensive draft documents. Nearly 59,000 comments were submitted, which were reviewed by federal officials and addressed in the final EIS. Community members also submitted public testimony during a formal comment period in March and April.

“We are pleased to see the agencies support a preferred alternative that balances clean hydropower, efficient navigation, and critical water supplies with ongoing salmon recovery efforts,” said Pacific Northwest Waterways Association Executive Director Kristin Meira. “The Columbia and Snake Rivers mean many things to many people in our region, and that includes the role they play as a significant transportation network for freight, the cruise industry and much more,” said Meira.

The agencies addressed several public comments about their decision to not breach the four lower Snake River dams, maintaining that the dams are critical infrastructure that Northwest communities depend on for low carbon hydropower and efficient river navigation. The EIS found that breaching the dams would require massive investments to replace the barging system with rail and trucking infrastructure, and would severely impact the cruising industry that brings an estimated 25,000 passengers up and down the river system each year.

Removal of the Snake River dams would cut off trade access for our region’s farmers and severely impact their ability to efficiently and safely move their products. In 2018 alone, over 38,966 rail cars or 149,870 trucks would have been needed to move the cargo that was barged on the Snake River.

Additionally, the EIS notes the Snake River dams play an important role in maintaining reliability in the production of power used to supply electricity in the Pacific Northwest. Removing the Snake River dams would more than double the region's risk of power shortages, and would also lead to an additional 1.3 MMT of CO2 annually, even with an increase in the use of other renewables.

The Preferred Alternative also includes additional measures to continue the federal commitment to endangered fish species including salmon, steelhead, lamprey and other resident fish. These actions include management of invasive species, improvements to fish and wildlife habitat, fish hatchery production, and management of avian and pinniped predators of salmonid species. It also includes new structural and operational measures to improve survival of fish as they pass the dams.

To review the final EIS, visit the Columbia River System Operations Web page at <https://www.nwd.usace.army.mil/CRSO/#top>.

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.