



# Nor'wester newsletter

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## CRSO Final EIS released

The CRSO Final EIS was released this morning. PNWA has sent out the following press release, which you may also access [here](#).

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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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](http://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](http://www.pnwa.net).*

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## Sen. Merkley introduces MARAD bill to aid ports



Today, Sen. Jeff Merkley (D-OR) was joined by Sen. Dan Sullivan (R-AK) in introducing the Maritime Transportation System Emergency Relief Act (MTSERA) which would establish maritime emergency relief authority for the U.S. Maritime Administration (MARAD) to provide critical financial assistance to ports and the maritime industry in the event of a national emergency or natural disaster.

Senator Merkley stated, "Ports are the lifeblood of economies up and down the coast and along the Columbia River in the Pacific Northwest region.

Unfortunately, our maritime industry is not immune from the economic destruction being caused by the coronavirus, spelling serious trouble for our families that rely on ports for their livelihoods. This urgently needed legislation would deliver critical resources to the ports and maritime industries and help our communities weather this pandemic and future national emergencies."

This bipartisan bill is the Senate companion legislation to [H.R.7515](#) the Maritime Transportation System Emergency Relief Act introduced on July 9, 2020 by House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Chairman Rep. Peter DeFazio (D-OR) and Rep. Sean Patrick Maloney (D-NY). The House version of the bill passed on July 21, 2020 as part of [H.R.6395](#) the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2021.

The Maritime Transportation System Emergency Relief Act (MTSERA) would help ports mitigate lost revenue and unexpected costs by allowing the Maritime Administration (MARAD) to provide emergency federal grants. The grants provided by MARAD could pay for ports' operating and overhead costs involved with emergency response operations, cleaning, sanitizing, janitorial

services, staffing, workforce retention, paid leave, procurement of protective health equipment, debt service payments, and infrastructure repair projects, among other essential needs. In the event of natural disasters, the emergency relief authority could also be invoked to allow MARAD to award grants to help repair or replace damaged equipment, facilities, and shore infrastructure.

PNWA has been pleased to work with Senator Merkley, Chairman DeFazio and our Northwest Congressional delegation to identify improved pathways for providing emergency funding for ports. We are very grateful for their responsiveness during this crisis and look forward to eventual passage of this important legislation.

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## FY2021 Corps of Engineers funding approved by House

Today, the U.S. House of Representatives passed [H.R.7617](#), a \$1.3T "minibus" containing six FY2021 appropriations bills, including Energy and Water Development, which addresses the Corps of Engineers. The bill passed 217 to 197 and the votes were split along party lines. PNWA staff is awaiting the publication of the final bill with amendments included, and will alert our members if there are any changes to proposed funding for [Northwest Corps projects](#).



The FY2021 Energy and Water Development bill appropriates funding to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Department of the Interior programs, the Department of Energy, and other related agencies. The bill provides a total of \$7.63 billion for the Corps which is an increase of \$1.7 billion above the Administration's budget request. In addition, the bill provides \$17 billion in emergency funding for Corps projects nationwide to improve infrastructure and reduce backlogs.

### *Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund (HMTF)*

The bill proposes \$1.68 billion in spending out of the HMTF. This is an increase of \$50 million above the FY2020 enacted level and \$665 million above the Administration's request. This meets the target set by authorizers for FY2021 and represents 92% of estimated revenues compared to the FY2021 target of 83%. However, it is not clear why the committee did not choose to take advantage of full use (100%) of HMTF for FY2021 when the full use authorization under the CARES Act will start January 1, 2021 unless the provision is passed sooner via WRDA. The bill also proposes to spend down the balance in the HMTF, which is estimated to be approximately \$10 billion and has been accumulating since 2003.

### *Construction*

The bill provides \$2.6 billion, \$447 million above the request. There is also \$10 billion in COVID-19 emergency funds intended for expediting projects that provide flood protection, ensure navigable channels, and restore the environment.

### *Investigations*

The bill provides \$151 million, equal to the FY2020 enacted level and \$48 million above the request. There is also \$110 million for feasibility studies as part of the COVID-19 emergency funds.

### *Operations and Maintenance (O&M)*

The bill provides \$3.84 billion, an increase of \$48 million above the FY2020 enacted level and \$1.8 billion above the request. The bill provides for seven new study starts and seven new construction projects. There is also \$5 billion in COVID-19 emergency funding to address outstanding O&M and repairs nationwide.

PNWA staff will continue to advocate for funding Northwest federal navigation projects throughout the remainder of the appropriations cycle, followed by the work plan process after the bill is enacted.

