

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

August 4, 2022

The Honorable Brenda Mallory
Chair, Council on Environmental Quality
730 Jackson Place, NW
Washington, DC 20503

Dear Chair Mallory,

As members of the Northwest delegation, we write to express our deep concern about recent actions taken by this administration which have demonstrated a seeming disregard for scientific integrity. Specifically, we were appalled by the lack of transparency and obvious political intervention in processes regarding the recent release of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) draft “report” relating to the Columbia River Basin. Even more alarming, we have received further indication of political maneuvering by this administration to prevent information on the costs of replacing the power generated by the lower Snake River dams on the Federal Columbia River Power System from being made public prior to the release of the previously mentioned NOAA draft “report.”

While the Columbia River System Operations (CRSO) Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and Record of Decision (ROD) took four years to complete, included multiple comment periods, and cost over \$50 million and countless staff hours, the recent NOAA draft “report” appears to have been released without process, prior Congressional notification, or any triggering action. Even more troubling, the NOAA draft “report” cites plaintiffs in *National Wildlife Federation et al. v. National Marine Fisheries Service et al. [01-640]* as sources without referencing non-plaintiff co-managers. Given the extreme and potentially damaging nature of these actions, we request your response to the following questions related to the draft “report” titled *Rebuilding Interior Columbia Basin Salmon and Steelhead* and the *BPA Lower Snake River Dams Power Replacement Study* no later than August 15, 2022:

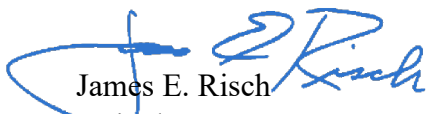
1. Were you or any members of your staff involved in delaying the release of the report entitled *BPA Lower Snake River Dams Replacement Study* prepared by Energy and Environmental Economics (E3 Study)? If so, what was the purpose of the delay?
2. If CEQ was not involved in the delay, what is CEQ’s understanding as to why the briefing with Northwest Power and Conservation Council Members scheduled for July 7, 2022, was delayed until July 12, 2022?
3. There were changes made to the E3 Study between the time an embargoed version was released to Congress on July 11, 2022 and when the report was made public on July 12, 2022.


- a. Did you or your staff direct any changes between the two versions?
 - b. Were you or your staff involved in any conversations considering changes between the two versions?
 - c. If the answer to either of these questions is yes, please detail the changes CEQ either directed or consulted on.
4. The E3 Study was released at the same time as the *Rebuilding Interior Columbia Basin Salmon and Steelhead* draft “report” released by NOAA (NOAA draft “report”). Were the two releases coordinated? If so, why?
 5. Were you or your staff involved in any way to urge the initiation of the NOAA draft “report”?
 6. Did you or your staff review any versions of the NOAA draft “report” prior to v2.5 dated July 11, 2022? If so, did you or your staff offer any notes, changes, or suggestions? If so, what were they?
 7. Did you or your staff in any way notify or brief any Congressional offices on the NOAA draft “report” prior to the initial member briefing notification sent by your staff on July 8, 2022? If so, which offices did you notify?
 8. Were any other parties outside of the administration, other than those specifically referenced in the NOAA draft “report,” briefed on or notified of the “report” ahead of the Congressional briefing on July 11, 2022, including but not limited to non-referenced co-managers, stakeholder groups, or members of the press? If so, why were these parties briefed prior to members of Congress?
 9. Did you or your staff direct NOAA to include input from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, scientists and fishery managers from the Nez Perce Tribe and State of Oregon in the NOAA draft “report” (as detailed in footnote 1, page 2 of the NOAA draft “report”)?
 10. Did you or your staff direct NOAA not to consult non-plaintiff co-managers?

The infrastructure on the Columbia River System provides invaluable benefits to the Pacific Northwest, including carbon-free energy, flood control mitigation, irrigation, navigation, and recreation benefits. Balancing these vital interests with species conservation is not an easy task. It is made significantly more difficult when science and collaboration is replaced by politically-motivated intervention.

The recent actions by this administration have sewn complete distrust in this administration’s ability to lead with facts, science, and transparency regarding the Columbia River System. These actions will undoubtedly have long-term and damaging effects on this administration’s ability to bring diverse stakeholders together to chart a path forward on species recovery and preservation of the vital benefits of the Columbia River System.

Sincerely,


James E. Risch
United States Senator


Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Member of Congress



Mike Crapo
United States Senator



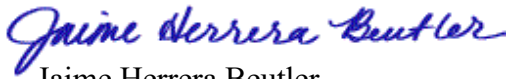
Dan Newhouse
Member of Congress



Steve Daines
United States Senator



Russ Fulcher
Member of Congress



Jaime Herrera Beutler
Member of Congress



Cliff Bentz
Member of Congress