

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 15, 2022

Administrator John Hairston
Chief Executive Officer, Bonneville Power Administration
PO Box 3621
Portland, OR 97208

Dear Administrator Hairston,

As you know, the Federal Columbia River Power System comprises 31 hydroelectric projects in the Columbia River Basin and provides approximately one third of the electricity used in the Pacific Northwest, as well as critical flood risk management, irrigation, and navigation benefits.

On September 28, 2020, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), Bureau of Reclamation (BoR), and Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) issued a joint Record of Decision (ROD) on the Columbia River System Operations Environmental Impact Statement (CRSO EIS). The CRSO EIS was developed in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act and is the product of a years-long public process aimed at reviewing and updating management of the 14 federal dams on the Columbia River system. The ROD was agreed upon and signed by each cooperating agency.

The Columbia River Basin is home to 61 different fish species. As indicated in the 2020 National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries Columbia River System Biological Opinion¹ (BiOp), 13 species of Columbia River Basin salmon and steelhead are impacted by the river power system and listed for protection under the Endangered Species Act. Of these 13 species, four travel the length of the Columbia River and through the lower Snake River dams to spawn²: Snake River steelhead, Snake River spring/summer Chinook, Snake River fall Chinook, and Snake River sockeye.

Of these species, according to Washington State's 2020 State of Salmon Report³, Snake River fall run Chinook are approaching their goal and Snake River Basin steelhead are making progress, while Snake River spring/summer Chinook remain in crisis. It is also important to note that while Puget Sound salmon are not impacted by the Columbia River Power System, they are

¹ <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/resource/document/biological-opinion-operation-and-maintenance-fourteen-multiple-use-dam-and>

² https://media.fisheries.noaa.gov/dam-migration/killerwhales_snakeriverdams.pdf

³ <https://stateofsalmon.wa.gov/statewide-data/salmon/>

in crisis⁴. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration has found Puget Sound salmon populations to be the priority food source for the Southern Resident killer whale⁵.

In October 2021, U.S. District Judge Michael Simon issued a stay in *National Wildlife Federation et al. v. National Marine Fisheries Service et al.* [01-640], litigation challenging the CRSO EIS and ROD. Shortly after this ruling, the White House Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) announced a public engagement effort focused on recovering Columbia Basin salmon, bull trout, and other listed and vulnerable species. In briefings for congressional staff, CEQ has indicated it is focused on the possibility of breaching the lower Snake River dams, but not to the exclusion of alternative solutions for recovering threatened and endangered species in the basin.

The lower Snake River dams provide BPA with capacity to meet peak energy demand loads. The four dams generate approximately 1,000 megawatts of power on average annually, with the capacity for generating over 3,000 megawatts of power⁶.

The need for this capacity was demonstrated during severe cold and heat events last year. In 2021, BPA issued assessments indicating the lower Snake River dams prevented rolling blackouts during the deep freeze and severe heat events in the Pacific Northwest. In January and February of 2021, the four dams each generated more than 400 megawatts of energy, with some providing more than 500 megawatts⁷. Additionally, during the 5-day heatwave in June, the lower Snake River dams held 15 percent of BPA's total required reserves. At their highest, the dams provided 1,118 megawatts of combined energy⁸.

The lower Snake River dams are not only critical to grid reliability in the Pacific Northwest, through fish passage adaptations, the dams have achieved 96 percent passage survival for juvenile yearling Chinook salmon and steelhead smolts⁹.

We share the goal of recovering threatened and endangered fish species in the Columbia River Basin, and we should be encouraged by recent returns on the lower Snake river. Snake River spring Chinook returns have increased since 2019, with 2020 returns up 55 percent and 2021 returns up 27 percent. Fisheries managers also predict a 40 percent increase in spring/summer Chinook on the Snake River in 2022¹⁰.

⁴ <https://stateofsalmon.wa.gov/statewide-data/salmon/>

⁵ <https://media.fisheries.noaa.gov/dam-migration/srkw-salmon-sources-factsheet.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.bpa.gov/-/media/Aep/about/publications/fact-sheets/fs-201603-A-Northwest-energy-solution-Regional-power-benefits-of-the-lower-Snake-River-dams.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.bpa.gov/about/newsroom/news-articles/20210616-lower-snake-river-dams-provided-crucial-energy-and-reserves-in-winter-20>

⁸ <https://www.bpa.gov/-/media/Aep/about/publications/news-releases/20210722-pr-10-21-lower-snake-river-dams-help-region-power-through-recent-heatwave.pdf>

⁹ <https://www.bpa.gov/-/media/Aep/about/publications/fact-sheets/fs-201603-A-Northwest-energy-solution-Regional-power-benefits-of-the-lower-Snake-River-dams.pdf>


¹⁰ <https://www.columbian.com/news/2021/dec/15/columbia-river-spring-chinook-projections-are-up-for-2022/#:~:text=This%20year's%20projection%20is%20for,last%20year's%20return%20of%201%2C800.>

We understand that the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) is engaged in CEQ's effort to recover Columbia Basin threatened and endangered fish species. Given the critical role the entire Federal Columbia River Power System plays in powering the Pacific Northwest, providing flood risk management, irrigation, and navigation benefits, as well as CEQ's focus on how breaching the lower Snake River dams may aid in fish recovery, we request answers to the following questions in writing no later than May 1, 2022:


1. Has BPA engaged in a study or contracted with a consultant to study any aspect of the four dams on the lower Snake River? If so:
 - a. What is being studied and what is the purpose of the study?
 - b. Where is the funding authorized for this study?
 - c. A recent [study](#) conducted by the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory and others outlined the necessity for hydropower on the Columbia-Snake Rivers for grid resilience throughout the western United States. BPA also put out a press release in July 2021 crediting the lower Snake River dams with keeping eastern Washington powered during the 2021 record heatwave. How is grid reliability and resilience being included in the analysis?
 - d. How is BPA valuing the carbon-free energy generated by the lower Snake River dams within this study, in light of President Biden's climate agenda and Executive Order 13990?
 - e. What information is this study expected to uncover that was not made available from the BiOp or ROD?
2. How has BPA weighed the importance of the baseload power generation hydropower on the lower Snake River provides in its engagement with CEQ on a solution for threatened and endangered species in the Columbia River Basin?
3. Has BPA conducted a study on the impacts to regional grid reliability and ratepayers, in the case of potential loss of renewable hydropower capacity on the lower Snake River? If so, please provide that study to us.
4. How has BPA focused on Executive Order 13990 and President Biden's 2030 greenhouse gas goals during its involvement with the CEQ stakeholder engagement process?
5. Does removing 3,000 megawatts of hydropower capacity on the lower Snake River support President Biden's 2030 greenhouse gas reduction targets?

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



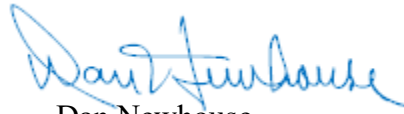
James E. Risch
United States Senator



Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Member of Congress



Mike Crapo
United States Senator



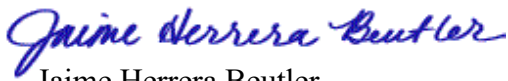
Dan Newhouse
Member of Congress



Steve Daines
United States Senator



Russ Fulcher
Member of Congress



Jaime Herrera Beutler
Member of Congress



Cliff Bentz
Member of Congress