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**Benton Rural
Electric Association**

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

BentonREA.org

**For Immediate Release:
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Benton REA Supports H.R. 3144

Prosser, Wash., -- Members of our local Congressional delegation have declared the value of affordable, reliable hydropower to our Northwest economy and way of life.

Benton Rural Electric Association wishes to thank Reps. Dan Newhouse (R-WA), Reps. Cathy McMorris Rodger (R-WA), Jaime Herrera Beutler (R-WA), Kurt Schrader (D-OR) and Greg Walden (R-OR) for introducing the bipartisan proposal, H.R. 3144, that would maintain current salmon protection measures and federal hydro system operations in the 2014 Federal Columbia River Power System Biological Opinion (FCRPS BiOp) until a Court-ordered review of alternatives is complete.

At the regular meeting of the Benton REA Board of Trustees on July 26, 2017, The Board unanimously approved a resolution to support the passage of H.R. 3144.

The proposed H.R. 3144 legislation is in response to the March 2017 ruling of the U.S. District Court in Oregon that disregards the current FCRP BiOp approved by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries in 2008/2010 and supplemented in 2014. The Court's ruling also directed the federal agencies responsible for the management of the FCRPS (namely the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA), the Army Corps of Engineers, and the Bureau of Reclamation) to undertake a comprehensive review of hydro operations under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and strongly urged them to include analysis of the removal, bypass or breaching of one or more of the four lower Snake River dams.

Members of Benton REA receive 86 percent of their electricity from the FCRPS, which relies upon the affordable, reliable and carbon-free energy produced by the eight large dams on the Columbia and Snake rivers to meet those needs. These dams not only provide affordable and reliable electricity, but also provide the economic and recreational benefits of flood control, navigation and irrigation in the Northwest.

The purpose of H.R. 3144 is to keep in place current measures that protect salmon on the Columbia and Snake rivers until a Court-ordered review of the FCRPS is complete. H.R. 3144 is a common-sense solution to the Court's ill-considered decision. First, H.R. 3144 requests a full NEPA review of the hydro system by September 2022. Then, it mandates the adoption of a new salmon plan or BiOp based on the public NEPA process and the science it yields.

The current BiOp has resulted in wild salmon numbers trending significantly upward and has successfully improved fish runs resulting in 97 percent of young salmon making it past the dams. The current BiOp proves that both dams and fish can coexist.

Without the approval of H.R. 3144, the federal agencies would be compelled to author a new 2018 BiOp without the benefit of the new science and public input provided by the comprehensive NEPA review. This legislation would also prevent experiments or spill tests at the eight Columbia and Snake river dams, as well as studies and modifications at the dams, which would restrict electrical generation creating uncertainties in BPA power costs and supply that could potentially raise Northwest electric power costs, including those of Benton REA and its members.

Our elected officials are representing the members of Benton REA and many other Northwest utility ratepayers on both sides of the aisle. Their bill protects salmon with measures vetted by the Obama Administration's top scientists, and at the same time, protects the hydro system that powers our economy and supplies the biggest part of our energy mix. Please join Benton REA in thanking them.

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Benton Rural Electric Association, also called Benton REA, is a member-owned and operated cooperative and has been providing affordable, reliable energy and other member driven compatible services to enhance the quality of life for all its members since 1937. Benton REA is led by a board of trustees representing each of the cooperative's eight trustee districts. Benton REA is headquartered in Prosser, Wash., with a branch office in West Richland. Visit www.bentonrea.org for more information.