

# The Time Is Now to Save the Dams

Share why you need the Snake River Dams during the federal agencies' 45-day comment period beginning February 28

At the time of publication, the release date for the Columbia River Systems operations environmental impact statement is scheduled for February 28. A 45-day public comment period begins immediately upon release of this statement, which will impact the future of the four lower Snake River dams.

Benton REA asks members to speak up and support the lower Snake River dams.

## What Is the EIS?

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Bureau of Reclamation and the Bonneville Power Administration are preparing an environmental impact statement in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act on operations, maintenance and configurations for 14 federal projects in the Columbia River System in the interior Columbia River Basin.

The final EIS may suggest tearing down the four lower Snake River dams—a potential loss of 3,000 MW of electricity per year in Eastern Washington we can't afford to lose.

## It's Time to Take Action

Your input during the 45-day comment period is critical to ensure the future of low-cost, carbon-free electricity in the

## The Future of the Snake River Dams Is in Jeopardy!

### YOUR ACTION IS NEEDED!

## Visit [BentonREA.org/SnakeRiverDams](http://BentonREA.org/SnakeRiverDams) and check your mail in March

Northwest.

Before April 13, please take a few minutes to submit your comments in support of the lower Snake River dams to the federal action agencies.

## Check Your Mailbox

In March, look in your mailbox for a letter from Benton REA.

We've drafted a sample message you may use to comment on the draft EIS. Add your comments or simply sign your name and mail it to Benton REA in the postage-paid envelope. Benton REA will gather these and mail or hand-deliver them to the federal agencies drafting the final EIS.

## Comment by Mail

If you'd rather send your comments directly to the public agencies, mail them

to: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Attn: CRSO EIS

P.O. Box 2870

Portland, OR 97208-2870

Postmark your letter by April 6 to ensure it arrives before the end of the comment period.

## Comment Online

A comment form can be found at [www.crso.info](http://www.crso.info) where you can draft and send your thoughts about the report.

If you need inspiration, look for the letter we'll mail you this month, visit our website or see page 29 of this magazine. ■

*For more information, videos and links to helpful resources about the lower Snake River dams, visit [BentonREA.org/SnakeRiverDams](http://BentonREA.org/SnakeRiverDams).*

# The Truth About Dams

With so many opinions surfacing about the lower Snake River dams, salmon, orca and the organizations involved in protecting these resources, it can be hard to discern fact from fiction.

Benton REA has a vested interest in maintaining our hydroelectric dams. This is based on what the co-op believes is best for its members. These facts are why Benton REA believes the lower Snake River dams must remain.

## Dams Prevent Blackouts

During an average year, the lower Snake River dams produce 1,004 MW of electricity with the ability to produce over 3,000 MW.

For the Tri-Cities' growing economy, the capacity of these dams is critical. In the next three years, more than 800 new homes will be built in West Richland.

According to the Bonneville Power Administration, without the energy and capacity these dams supply, the region's loss of load probability increases. This is a measure of whether or not the region can keep the lights on.

Without the Snake River dams, blackouts may become a serious threat. Several times, Ice Harbor's ability to quickly increase production has prevented blackouts in the Tri-Cities during the summer heat when electricity is in peak demand to run air conditioners.

## Dams Meet Carbon-Free Goals

Hydropower will make our state's clean energy goals possible. Senate Bill 5116, passed into law in 2019, commits the state to a path for no coal generation by 2025 and 100% clean energy by 2045.

Zero carbon emissions are produced during hydropower production. No other solutions have been suggested that are as efficient, affordable or reliable as hydropower in achieving this bold goal.

## Dams Make Wind and Solar Possible

The dams help us safely add new renewable resources, like wind and solar power, to the grid. Without hydroelectricity to fill in the gaps, the grid cannot take the swings in generation caused by fluctuations

in wind and sunshine.

Replacing hydropower with wind and solar energy is not a reliable solution.

The Northwest's demand for electricity is highest in the winter when wind is less prevalent and the sun sets early in the day.

Half the time during periods of peak energy use, wind farms in the BPA balancing area generate no more than 10% of their full potential.

To replace the winter energy capability of the lower Snake River dams with solar would take thousands of megawatts of solar panels. According to BPA, this would be extraordinarily expensive for ratepayers including Benton REA members.

Low-cost hydropower typically performs at 100% capacity 90% to 98% of the time.

## Dams Provide Affordable Electricity

The Northwest literally cannot afford to lose the lower Snake River dams.

During the last regional energy shortage, power bills jumped 45% and industries closed, leaving thousands without jobs. A repeat would worsen our homeless crisis and mean great hardships to people who are already struggling to make ends meet.

Washington state ranks among the

lowest in the nation for average residential price of electricity. Our economy depends on low-cost power. Losing the lower Snake River dams would create cost increases and negatively impact our economy.

## Dams Are Just One Factor for Orca

According to NOAA Fisheries, reduced prey is just one of four factors threatening the Southern Resident Killer Whales. The others include vessel traffic and noise, toxic contaminants and inbreeding.

Each year, BPA ratepayers provide millions of dollars to fund habitat restoration actions and fish hatcheries throughout the Columbia Basin.

The population of combined natural and hatchery Chinook salmon—the orca's favorite meal—has grown from 225 million juvenile salmon in 1975 to 406 million in 2015. According to researchers, orcas do not distinguish between hatchery and naturally producing adult salmon.

Salmon from the lower Snake Rivers are just part of an orca's diet. NOAA Fisheries' analysis shows Puget Sound Chinook salmon are the most important for the Southern Residents because they have access to them for a greater part of the year than fish from the Columbia, Snake and Fraser rivers.

Puget Sound salmon carry high levels of contaminants such as prescription drugs and antibacterial compounds that affect their growth, reproduction and behavior. Furthermore, ship noise drowns out the echolocation orcas use to track prey.

There's no guarantee dam breaching will solve the plight of the Southern Resident Orca. There's too much at risk to take this chance. Please consider all the facts before making decisions that impact the future of our environment and livelihoods. ■

## Average Prices for Residential Electricity

2017 figures, in cents per kWh

