



BENTON RURAL ELECTRIC ASSOCIATION

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May 11, 2022

To Governor Jay Inslee and Senator Patty Murray,

A process to remove and replace highly productive, carbon-free hydroelectric dams is contradictory to your commitment to fight climate change. We know you realize this. What we don't know is why you keep spending taxpayer money to study it.

The most important thing we can do for salmon is to fight climate change through reducing our CO₂ emissions. Utilizing more, not less, renewable and carbon-free hydropower will improve the health of our land, sea and ultimately all of the people in the Pacific Northwest.

As a locally owned and operated electric cooperative that has been providing reliable electric service in Washington State since 1937, our 12,000 members see the increasing need for electricity and the implications associated with losing the lower Snake River dams (LSRDs).

Benton REA is supportive of vehicles that consume and produce zero carbon-emissions. Electric vehicle adoption is growing and with it the demand for electricity will increase.

If Washington state eliminates natural gas as a fuel source to heat new homes and businesses, where will the electricity come from to keep families warm and safe, and how much will it cost?

The Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) estimates that removing the LSRDs will increase electric bills for millions of customers by 25% or more. The carbon free, low-cost hydropower keeps energy affordable for low-income communities. Many community-owned utilities that receive power supply from BPA have higher rates of senior, Hispanic and Native American residents than other for-profit power providers in our state.

How can we justify increasing the cost of heating and cooling for our most vulnerable populations, who frequently must choose between keeping their power on or feeding and clothing their families?

1 MW of wind or solar power is not equal to 1 MW of hydropower. To replace the firm, dispatchable, and reliable 3,000 MW of electrical generation of the lower Snake River dams with intermittent and unreliable renewables such as wind and solar would be costly, not just in dollars and cents, but also with regard to the non-firm resources that would need to be constructed to obtain the generating capacity from thousands of wind turbines and solar panels.

Dam breaching is not the best alternative for our region for these reasons:



The Lower Snake River Dams Prevent Blackouts – The lower Snake River dams have already avoided blackouts in the Tri-Cities. Thousands of new homes and businesses will be built here in the next few years. Our economy is growing. Because they can quickly increase energy production with firm and dispatchable power, all four lower Snake River dams have never been more important to avoid blackouts with renewable, carbon-free hydroelectricity.

The lower Snake River dams can produce 3,000 MW of carbon-free, renewable, and clean electricity.

Hydropower acts as a battery, holding potential energy in its reservoirs for when it needs to be dispatched – such as the extreme cold of February 2021 and the heat wave that surfaced at the end of June 2021. Wind and solar cannot act on-demand, and are not dispatchable, like hydropower. It's there when you need it.

“If not for Ice Harbor (dam), we would have been scrambling with customers to move loads around to avoid putting customers in the dark,” – BPA VP of Transmission Operations Michelle Cathcart



The Dams Make Wind and Solar Energy Possible – Without hydroelectricity to fill in the gaps, the regions' electricity grid cannot absorb the swings in generation caused by fluctuations due to wind and sunshine sometimes not being available. The Northwest's demand for electricity is highest in the winter when wind is less prevalent, and when the sun sets early.



The Dams Provide Affordable Electricity – Several independent studies indicate a shortage of electricity generation in the coming years, particularly with the closure of coal plants. The lower Snake River dams are critically needed to avoid a repeat of the 2000-2001 energy crisis that resulted in soaring electricity prices.

“If Bonneville had to replace the four lower Snake River projects' full capability with zero-carbon resources, the rate pressure could be up to 50% on wholesale power rates.” – Page 32 of the Columbia River System Operations Environmental Impact Statement Executive Summary

More than half of Benton REA's retail electricity rate covers wholesale power costs. Therefore, replacing lost generation from the LSRDs with carbon-free resources could result in a 25% increase in power costs to our members. Some can afford this, but most Washingtonians cannot. A rise in energy costs would raise the energy burden for vulnerable households more significantly and worsen our homeless crisis. This is wrong.



Hydropower is Reliable

Hydropower acts as a battery holding potential energy in its reservoirs for when it is needed—such as the heat wave of June 2021. Intermittent wind and solar cannot perform the same as on-demand, firm, dispatchable, hydropower. It's always there when you need it.



The Dams Meet Washington's Carbon-Free Goals – Washington state's Clean Energy Transformation Act (CETA) commits us to a path of no coal generation by 2025 and 100% clean energy by 2045. Zero carbon emissions are produced during hydropower generation.

Removing the lower Snake River Dams will add more carbon-emitting trucks and trains, not to mention more fossil fuel consumption. This does not align with Washington's clean energy goals.



The Dams Create Tourism, Recreation, and Jobs – A free-flowing river would remove all water related recreation and tourism between Lewiston, Idaho, and Pasco, Washington, and would lower the water level of many river-side communities, forcing them to rebuild quickly or lose forever their visitor revenue.



The Dams Make Agriculture in the PNW Possible – The Columbia-Snake River System is the top wheat export gateway in the U.S. In addition to grain, the river system moves nearly \$3 billion worth of other commercial cargo.

Apples, alfalfa, grapes onion, potatoes and sugar beets are grown with irrigation water from the reservoir behind Ice Harbor Dam.



The Dams Are Just One Factor in Salmon and Orca Survival – Salmon from the Snake River are only one part of an orca's diet. Salmon survival rates through these dams are as high as 97%. NOAA Fisheries' analysis shows Puget Sound Chinook salmon are the most important for the orca Southern Residents. Cleaning the Puget Sound, and reducing carbon output, would be a better use of time and money in the effort save our treasured salmon and orca.

Additionally, a peer-reviewed study conducted by Canadian researchers showed a 65% decline in Chinook salmon survival in Pacific Ocean rivers over the last 50 years. Salmon mortality is decreasing from Northern California to Southeast Alaska and in undammed rivers. Money and time should be spent on ocean research, not Snake River dam breaching.

The cleanest step forward for helping the salmon runs to recover is to retain our carbon-free, renewable energy producing, hydroelectric generation, to produce electricity and transport goods, rather than relying on fossil fuels that cause ocean temperatures to rise. Don't step backwards in our climate change fight by removing hydroelectricity from our fuel mix.

We support science-based, region-wide commitment to salmon recovery across all aspects of the salmon life cycle.

The money and time spent on the current stakeholder process to examine replacing the services provided by the lower Snake River dams could be put to better use to:

1. Study and mitigate rising ocean temperatures (salmon's habitat for most of their lives),
2. Fund hatchery modernization and support,
3. Correct the natural blockages of fish passage across the Northwest as seen on this map (<https://geodataservices.wdfw.wa.gov/hp/fishpassage/index.html>),
4. Support local conservation groups doing the work to help salmon every day, and
5. Keep your commitment to fight climate change by decarbonizing our power grid through the preservation of our state's existing hydropower and nuclear generation.

Thank you for taking the time to consider the information provided in this letter.

Sincerely,

The members and staff of the Benton Rural Electric Association



Connie Krull
Benton Rural Electric Association Board President