

House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee
Member Day Hearing on Water Resources Development Act of 2022
Statement for the Record
Congresswoman Cathy McMorris Rodgers

Thank you, Chairman DeFazio and Ranking Member Graves, for your work on the Water Resources and Development Act (WRDA) of 2022, as well as the time each of your staff members have put into this process. I appreciate the opportunity to highlight my priorities for WRDA 2022.

My top priority is to protect the Federal Columbia River Power System (FCRPS) and the four dams on the Lower Snake River. As you both know, the FCRPS comprises 31 hydroelectric projects in the Columbia River Basin and provides one third of the electricity used in the Pacific Northwest, as well as critical flood risk management, irrigation, and navigation benefits. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) operates the Columbia River's Chief Joseph Dam, the second largest hydropower producing dam in the United States, as well as a series of eight dams on the lower Columbia and Snake Rivers.

There has been much attention paid to the FCRPS over the past few years, particularly due to *National Wildlife Federation et. al. v. National Marine Fisheries Service et. al* [01-640], litigation challenging the 2020 Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and Record of Decision (ROD) jointly issued by the USACE, Bureau of Reclamation (BoR), and Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) on the Columbia River System Operations. In October of last year, U.S. District Judge Michael Simon issued a stay in this case. Since that time, the four Lower Snake River Dams have continued to be the target of the plaintiffs and national environmental groups, with calls for dam breaching or making significant changes to dam operations that would functionally breach the dams.

I am concerned that emotions continue to overshadow facts when it comes to Columbia Basin salmon recovery and the impact that the Lower Snake River dams have on threatened and endangered salmon populations. These are the facts: the Columbia River Basin is home to 61 different fish species, and thirteen 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, only four travel the length of the Columbia River and through the Lower

Snake River dams to spawn: Snake River Steelhead, Snake River Spring/Summer Chinook, Snake River Fall Chinook, and Snake River Sockeye.¹

Of these four species, according to Washington State's 2020 State of Salmon Report, 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.² It is also important to note that while Puget Sound Salmon are not impacted by the Columbia River Power System, they are in crisis.³ Further, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration has found Puget Sound Salmon to be the priority fish populations for the Southern Resident Killer Whale.⁴

I share the goal of recovering threatened and endangered fish species in the Columbia River Basin, which is why I have been a proponent for the clean, renewable hydropower that is generated by the river system, and specifically, the Lower Snake River dams. 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 power.⁵ 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 megawatts.⁶ Additionally, during the 5-day heatwave in June, the Lower Snake River dams held 15% of BPA's total required reserves. At their highest, the dams provided 1,118 megawatts of combined energy.⁷

The Lower Snake River dams are not only critical to grid reliability in the Pacific Northwest, through fish passage adaptations, they achieve 96 percent passage survival for juvenile yearling Chinook salmon and steelhead smolts. We also have reason to be encouraged

¹ https://media.fisheries.noaa.gov/dam-migration/killerwhales_snakeriverdams.pdf

² <https://stateofsalmon.wa.gov/statewide-data/salmon/>

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

⁴ <https://media.fisheries.noaa.gov/dam-migration/srkw-salmon-sources-factsheet.pdf>

⁵ <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>

⁶ <https://www.bpa.gov/about/newsroom/news-articles/20210616-lower-snake-river-dams-provided-crucial-energy-and-reserves-in-winter-20>

⁷ <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>

by recent fish 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 for Spring/Summer Chinook on the Snake River in 2022.⁸

The bottom line is that efforts to breach the Lower Snake River dams are misguided, which is why I have submitted a request to WRDA 2022 that would prevent funding or authorization of the study of removal, study of power, flood control, or navigation replacement, dam removal technical assistance, or removal of powered Federal dams in the USACE Northwestern Division. It's time to stop focusing on distractions and start focusing on solutions that will get results for all salmon in the Columbia River Basin.

One such solution would be fish passage at Howard Hanson Dam on the Green River, which would reopen over 60 miles of prime habitat for Endangered Species Act-listed salmon and steelhead populations. In October 2015, NOAA Fisheries issued a draft jeopardy opinion to the Army Corps for the continued operation of HAHD and full realization of the Howard A. Hanson Dam Additional Water Storage Project (HAHD-AWSP)—a multi-phase habitat restoration and flood mitigation effort authorized by Water Resources Development Act of 1999. NOAA fisheries found the dam puts Chinook salmon, Puget Sound steelhead, and Southern resident orcas at risk. On February 15, 2019, the Army Corps and NOAA Fisheries agreed to the Howard A. Hanson Dam Biological Opinion, which outlines the Army Corps' responsibility to design and construct a downstream fish passage facility to aid the recovery of ESA-listed species. The USACE is in the final stages of completing the updated cost assessment and Director's Report. The updated cost assessment is expected to be completed in March 2021 with the Director's Report to follow. The authorization of the Director's Report is needed to move to the construction phase of the project and completion of Phase I of the HAHD-AWSP. I have submitted a request that directs the USACE Secretary to expedite design for fish passage facilities at Howard Hanson Dam.

Moving to navigation challenges on the Snake River, it is absolutely critical for Congress to help better define the navigation channel at the confluence of the Snake and Clearwater Rivers in Eastern Washington and Western Idaho. Under the River and Harbors Act of 1945, the

^{8 8} <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>

Federal channel of the Snake River is vaguely defined. The Walla Walla District of the USACE previously exercised broad discretion when conducting dredging actions to maintain the federal channel, turning basins, and access channels. Dredging is not currently needed annually, but it is needed more routinely to ensure the grain terminals and port cruise terminal at the Ports of Lewiston and Clarkston are fully accessible. In any given year, nearly 10 percent of U.S. wheat exports transit the Snake River, and the grain terminals are the starting point on the primary transportation path for the bulk of Idaho's wheat moving to the West Coast for export. This area is also critical to the river cruise industry, which provides over \$15 million in direct economic benefits to the region. We must ensure a properly maintained channel to provide transportation efficiency and increased navigation safety. Clearly defining the Snake River channel, turning basins, and secondary access channels in the Lower Granite pool will assist the Corps in planning routine maintenance and safe and efficient transportation access for the Port of Clarkston, Washington and Lewiston, Idaho in a manner that aligns with current USACE policies and practice nationwide. You will see that I have included a table with detailed coordinates for the navigation channel definition in my submission to the member portal.

Finally, Chairman, I have appreciated our partnership on all things Columbia River Treaty over the past several years. Your contributions to the many discussions we have had with administration officials and our colleagues in the Pacific Northwest about the treaty negotiations will be missed by all next Congress and in the years to come. I appreciate the work that the committee has already done to ensure USACE has the authorization and resources it needs to help support our team within the Department of State during its negotiations with the Canadian government. I support making sure the United States has a plan in place to address Columbia River Treaty-related issues, and if USACE needs additional support to put this plan in place, I would support its inclusion in WRDA 2022. I look forward to our continued work on this matter as the final bill takes shape.

Thank you again for the opportunity to share my priorities for WRDA 2022 with the committee. Please do not hesitate to contact me or my staff should you have questions about any of my requests.