

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 15, 2022

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden,

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

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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 loads⁶. The four dams generate approximately 1,000 megawatts of power on average annually, with the capacity for generating over 3,000 megawatts of power.

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 also 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.

We understand that CEQ has been engaging regional stakeholders and other industries in an effort to recover Columbia Basin threatened and endangered fish species. Given the critical role

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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:

- Is CEQ formally re-entering consultation on the 2020 ROD?
- If so, what was the mechanism for determining to re-enter consultation? Was there public notice of this decision?
- If not, under what authority is CEQ convening agencies?
- Other than bringing the agencies together for discussions on species recovery, what actions is the Council directly taking and in what activities is it participating?
- How has CEQ determined which stakeholders it will engage? How is CEQ engaging these stakeholders?
- Is CEQ engaging tribal governments in these discussions? If so, where does CEQ derive authority to participate in government-to-government meetings?
- What is CEQ's timeline of action, and how was it determined?
- What information is this stakeholder engagement process expected to uncover that was not made available from the BiOp or ROD?

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



James E. Risch
United States Senator



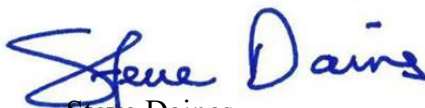
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Mike Crapo
United States Senator



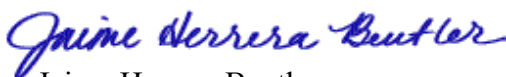
Dan Newhouse
Member of Congress



Steve Daines
United States Senator



Russ Fulcher
Member of Congress



Jaime Herrera Beutler
Member of Congress



Cliff Bentz
Member of Congress

CC: Brenda Mallory, Chair, Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ)

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 15, 2022

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary, U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

As you may 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

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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 loads⁶. The four dams generate approximately 1,000 megawatts of power on average annually, with the capacity for generating over 3,000 megawatts of power.

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 also provide a critically important pathway to the West Coast from the Inland Northwest for wheat, corn, soy, wood, minerals, automobiles, and other products. Ten percent of all U.S. wheat exports travel through the lower Snake River dams. Transportation through the Columbia-Snake River system does not require the surface transportation infrastructure, labor availability, or emissions of other transportation methods. Replacing the capacity of a single barge on the System would require 35 rail cars or 134 semi-trucks⁹.

The lower Snake River dams are not only critical to grid reliability in the Pacific Northwest. Through fish passage adaptations, the dams have also achieved 96 percent passage survival for juvenile yearling Chinook salmon and steelhead smolts¹⁰.

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

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returns up 27 percent. Fisheries managers also predict a 40 percent increase in spring/summer Chinook on the Snake River in 2022¹¹.


Due to the impact that CEQ's stakeholder engagement process and focus on breaching the lower Snake River dams may have on the U.S. agricultural sector, we request answers to the following questions in writing no later than May 1, 2022:

- Has CEQ included the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) in the current stakeholder engagement process examining species recovery in the Columbia River Basin?
- If so, what is USDA's role in that process?
- With the significant supply chain challenges the United States is already experiencing, including a shortage of containers, rail cars, and CDL drivers, would a reduction in inland port capacity create further supply chain constraints for U.S. agricultural goods?
- Has the USDA been consulted on the impact removing the lower Snake River dams would have on wheat producers, specifically how removing the producers' method of transportation to the West Coast would affect the U.S. wheat and other domestic markets?

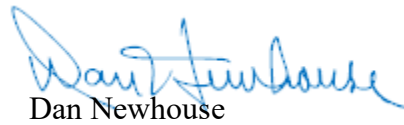
Thank you for your attention to this matter.


Sincerely,


James E. Risch
United States Senator


Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Member of Congress


Mike Crapo
United States Senator


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Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 15, 2022

The Honorable Michael Connor
Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works
108 Army Pentagon
Washington, DC 20310

Dear Assistant Secretary Connor,

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.

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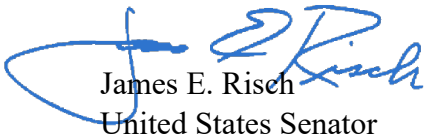
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We understand that USACE is engaged in CEQ's effort to recover Columbia Basin threatened and endangered fish species. Given the critical role the entire Federal Columbia River Power System plays in powering the Pacific Northwest, providing flood risk 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 in writing to the following questions no later than May 1, 2022:

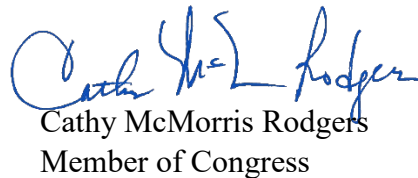
- Has CEQ included the USACE in the current stakeholder engagement process examining species recovery in the Columbia River Basin?
- Is the USACE the lead on the process as it was the CRSO EIS? If not, why?
- What information is this process expected to uncover that was not made available from the BiOp or ROD?
- Has any new information become available since the CRSO ROD led by the USACE indicating a new review process need be initiated?

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



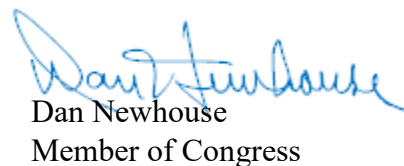
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United States Senator



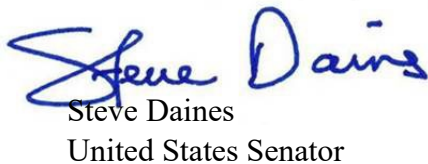
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Russ Fulcher
Member of Congress



Jaime Herrera Beutler
Member of Congress



Cliff Bentz
Member of Congress

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 15, 2022

The Honorable Brian Nichols
Assistant Secretary of State for the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs
2201 C St NW
Washington, DC 20220

Dear Assistant Secretary Nichols,

We write to ask for further clarification on the State Department's role in a process the administration may be undertaking regarding the Columbia River system. Specifically, we understand the White House Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) is engaging various involved domestic agencies with respect to an effort focused on recovering Columbia Basin threatened and endangered fish species including the consideration of dam breaching. We appreciate the extensive efforts by the State Department to conclude a new Columbia River Treaty that upholds the broad range of important national interests in the careful management of the Columbia River system. However, we would like to raise our concerns and gain further clarification from State as to how any system review is being balanced with the delicate and complex negotiations to achieve an updated Columbia River Treaty.

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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:


- Has the State Department been included or consulted in the stakeholder engagement process led by CEQ examining species recovery strategies in the Columbia River Basin, including potential breaching of the four dams on the lower Snake River?
- Has CEQ consulted the State Department on how the stakeholder engagement process and conversations surrounding the removal of hydropower from the system may impact Columbia River Treaty negotiations?

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



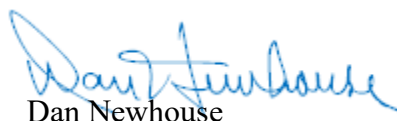
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Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 15, 2022

The Honorable Richard Spinrad, Ph.D.
Administrator, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
1401 Constitution Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Administrator Spinrad,

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.

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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

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The lower Snake River dams provide BPA with capacity to meet peak energy demand loads⁶. The four dams generate approximately 1,000 megawatts of power on average annually, with the capacity for generating over 3,000 megawatts of power.

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 also 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.

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We understand that NOAA Fisheries is engaged in CEQ's effort focused on recovering 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 by no later than May 1, 2022:


- Has CEQ included NOAA Fisheries in the current stakeholder engagement process examining species recovery in the Columbia River Basin?
- If so:
 - What is NOAA Fisheries' role in this process?
 - What information is this process expected to uncover that was not made available from the BiOp or ROD?
 - Is NOAA Fisheries analyzing ESA-listed or threatened fish basin-wide including those that do not travel to the ocean via the lower Snake River?
 - If not, why?

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



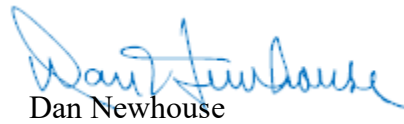
James E. Risch
United States Senator




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

CC: Janet Coit
Acting Assistant Administrator, NOAA Fisheries

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 15, 2022

The Honorable Jennifer M. Granholm
Secretary, U.S. Department of Energy
1000 Independence Ave, SW
Washington, DC 20585

Dear Secretary Granholm,

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.

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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.

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The lower Snake River dams are not only critical to grid reliability in the Pacific Northwest. Through fish passage adaptations, the dams have also 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.

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We understand that the Department of Energy (DOE) is engaged in CEQ's effort focused on recovering 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 DOE 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 to 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 DOE 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 DOE 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. How has DOE focused on Executive Order 13990 and President Biden's 2030 greenhouse gas goals during its involvement with the CEQ stakeholder engagement process?
4. 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.

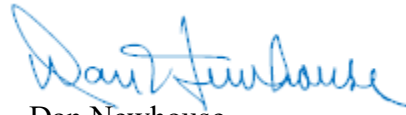
Sincerely,


James E. Risch
United States Senator


Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Member of Congress



Mike Crapo
United States Senator



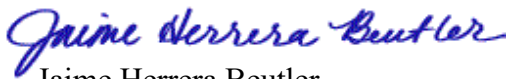
Dan Newhouse
Member of Congress



Steve Daines
United States Senator



Russ Fulcher
Member of Congress



Jaime Herrera Beutler
Member of Congress



Cliff Bentz
Member of Congress

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.

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 - 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?
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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,



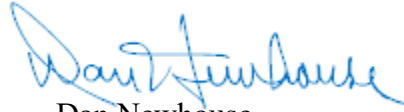
James E. Risch
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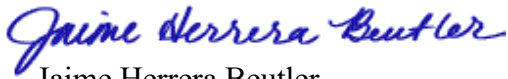
Dan Newhouse
Member of Congress



Steve Daines
United States Senator



Russ Fulcher
Member of Congress



Jaime Herrera Beutler
Member of Congress



Cliff Bentz
Member of Congress

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 15, 2022

The Honorable Martha Williams
Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
U.S. Department of Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Director Williams,

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.

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We understand that the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) 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:


- Has CEQ included FWS in the current stakeholder engagement process examining species recovery in the Columbia River Basin?
- If so:
 - What is FWS' role in this process?
 - What information is this process expected to uncover that was not made available from the BiOp or ROD?
 - Is FWS analyzing ESA-listed or threatened fish basin-wide, including those that do not travel to the ocean via the lower Snake River?
 - If not, why?

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



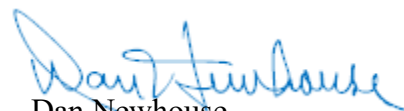
James E. Risch
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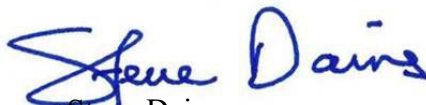
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Dan Newhouse
Member of Congress



Steve Daines
United States Senator



Russ Fulcher
Member of Congress



Jaime Herrera Beutler
Member of Congress



Cliff Bentz
Member of Congress

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 15, 2022

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg
Secretary, U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Ave, SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary Buttigieg,

As you may 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>

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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 loads⁶. The four dams generate approximately 1,000 megawatts of power on average annually, with the capacity for generating over 3,000 megawatts of power.

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 15percent of BPA's total required reserves. At their highest, the dams provided 1,118 megawatts of combined energy⁸.

The lower Snake River dams also provide a critically important pathway to the West Coast from the Inland Northwest for wheat, corn, soy, wood, minerals, automobiles, and other products. Ten percent of all U.S. wheat exports travel through the lower Snake River dams. Transportation through the Columbia-Snake River system does not require the surface transportation infrastructure, labor availability, or emissions of other transportation methods. Replacing the capacity of a single barge on the System would require 35 rail cars or 134 semi-trucks⁹.

The lower Snake River dams are not only critical to grid reliability in the Pacific Northwest. Through fish passage adaptations, the dams have also achieved 96 percent passage survival for juvenile yearling Chinook salmon and steelhead smolts¹⁰.

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/news/pubs/FactSheets/fs200901-Power%20benefits%20of%20the%20lower%20Snake%20River%20dams.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.hydroreview.com/environmental/bpa-report-lower-snake-river-dams-helped-region-power-through-recent-heatwave/>

⁹ <https://www.pnwa.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/CSRS.pdf>

¹⁰ <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>


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 2022¹¹.

Due to the impact that CEQ's stakeholder engagement process and focus on breaching the lower Snake River dams may have on U.S. surface transportation infrastructure, we request answers to the following questions in writing no later than May 1, 2022:


- Has CEQ included the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) in the current stakeholder engagement process examining species recovery in the Columbia River Basin?
- If so, what is DOT's role in that process?
- With the significant infrastructure challenges the United States is already experiencing, would a reduction in inland port capacity lead to further stresses on surface transportation infrastructure in the Pacific Northwest?
- Has the DOT been consulted on the emissions increase that would result from railcars or trucks replacing barging traffic should the lower Snake River dams be breached?

Thank you for your attention to this matter.


Sincerely,




James E. Risch
United States Senator



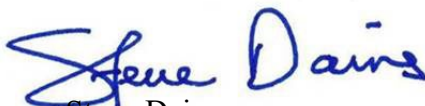
Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Member of Congress



Mike Crapo
United States Senator



Dan Newhouse
Member of Congress



Steve Daines
United States Senator



Russ Fulcher
Member of Congress

¹¹ <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.>

Jaime Herrera Beutler

Jaime Herrera Beutler
Member of Congress

Cliff Bentz

Cliff Bentz
Member of Congress

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 15, 2022

The Honorable Camille Touton
Commissioner, Bureau of Reclamation
U.S. Department of Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Commissioner Touton,

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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.

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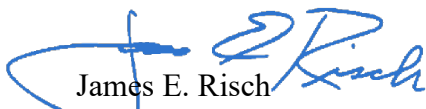
¹⁰ <https://www.columbian.com/news/2021/dec/15/columbia-river-spring-chinook-projections-are-up-for-2022/#:~:text=This%20year's%20projection%20is%20for,last%20year's%20return%20of%201%2C800.>

We understand that BoR 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:


- Has CEQ included BoR in the current stakeholder engagement process examining species recovery in the Columbia River Basin?
- If so:
 - What is BoR's role in this process?
 - What information is this process expected to uncover that was not made available from the BiOp or ROD?
 - Is BoR analyzing ESA-listed or threatened fish basin-wide, including those that do not travel to the ocean via the lower Snake River?
 - If not, why?

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



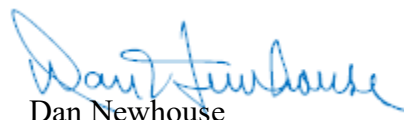
James E. Risch
United States Senator




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Mike Crapo
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