



Another View: Breaching Snake River dams

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Amazingly, environmental and fishing groups have reanalyzed some old reports and come to the same conclusion they did before: Breaching the dams on the Lower Snake River would be an economic boon for Eastern Washington.

The reports aren't new. The interest groups' analysis isn't, either.

The defenders of irrigators and hydropower, while also falling back on their old arguments, at least have logic on their side.

The coalition describes itself this way:

"The Save Our Wild Salmon Coalition (SOS) is a nationwide coalition of conservation organizations, commercial and sport fishing associations, businesses, river groups, and taxpayer advocates working to restore self-sustaining, healthy, harvestable, and abundant wild salmon to the rivers and streams of the Pacific Northwest.

"We believe the most effective method of achieving our goal is by removing the four Lower Snake River dams."

The first paragraph sounds good, but the second reveals what's already apparent to SOS's critics. The "study" is aimed at justifying an existing conclusion, rather than figuring out the best hope for restoring salmon runs.

Take the logic of removing the Lower Snake dams to its logical conclusion. It leads inevitably to removing (or breaching) every dam in the Northwest — indeed, in the United States.

That's what is at the heart of this. Dams, according to environmental extremists, are morally bad.

Then there's the math.

Somehow, the Northwest supposedly will prosper with the four Lower Snake dams removed from power production. Yet that prosperity inevitably would come from taxpayer investments or credits for new wind farms and the like.

In other words, costs would be counted as income.

Here's how SOS puts it:

“Removing these four dams — four out of more than 220 major dams in the Columbia River Basin — will likely save American taxpayers and Northwest electricity ratepayers a minimum of about \$12 million to \$2 billion over 10 years, and \$2 billion to \$5 billion over 20 years, and restore Snake River salmon in the process.

“Beyond the billions saved, removing the four lower Snake River dams will ultimately produce as much as a five-fold increase — between almost \$4 billion to \$7 billion over 10 years — in new annual revenue generated from tourism, recovered fish runs and outdoor recreation.”

Consider the SOS estimate that Northwest electrical users will have rate savings of \$12 million to \$2 billion over 10 years — that’s some wide range. It’s like saying you’ll spend something between \$1,200 and \$200,000 on your next refrigerator.

Similarly, the SOS contention that removing the four lower Snake River dams could reap \$4.2 billion to \$24.4 billion in savings and increased economic activity over 20 years is hardly compelling.

For starters, it’s not clear that dam breaching would save salmon. Independent scientific studies question that premise.

And remember, that “economic activity” includes paying for a means of generating the power the dams already produce.

It’s a classic case of throwing money at a problem.

We thought that was the way of Congress.

Oh, that’s right. It’s tax money that the SOS coalition intends to be spent.

Easy come, easy go.