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Northwest families and businesses to invest billions more in salmon recovery

Plans for spending nearly \$9 billion more in the next 10 years on protecting endangered salmon runs in the Columbia and Snake rivers need to be based on strong science and collaboration to insure that the investment by families and businesses in the Northwest is not wasted, Northwest RiverPartners said Monday.

Terry Flores, executive director of the alliance, called for using the latest fisheries research and giving the region's electricity customers a strong voice in implementing the federal hydro system biological opinion released today.

"Families and businesses in the Northwest are already paying 20 to 30 percent a month on their electricity bills for fish and wildlife programs," Flores said.

"This latest salmon plan could add considerably more to customer bills in these difficult economic times with families struggling to put increasingly expensive food on the table and pay rapidly escalating costs for gasoline and energy."

Flores noted that the region's utility customers have paid \$9 billion over the past 20 years on fish and wildlife programs based on the recommendations of state fish agencies and tribes.

"The answer to salmon recovery is not to throw more money at it, but to ensure that the dollars are well spent and deliver results," Flores said. "To accomplish that, the customers making the investment must have a place at the implementation table along with the states and tribes."

The federal biological opinion calls for massive investments in habitat affected by the federal dams on the Columbia and Snake Rivers in addition to dam improvements, new and expanded hatcheries and predation controls.

"Yet, the direct killing or harvesting of salmon under the protection of the Endangered Species Act continues to be neglected," Flores said. "The biological opinion released today on Lower Columbia commercial, sport and tribal harvest allows the continued taking of listed fish instead of conserving them."

(MORE)

“Our concern is that the massive investment being made by regional electricity customers will be compromised if harvest is allowed to continue at unsustainable rates.”

The members of Northwest RiverPartners support science-based, accountable improvements in salmon recovery and protection of other benefits of the Columbia and Snake rivers.

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