

Opinion

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GUEST VIEWPOINT

Removing the Snake River dams would be a colossal breach of logic

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On Nov. 15, a report titled "Revenue Stream" was released, calling for the removal of the four lower Snake River dams. The Register-Guard commented favorably on this report in a Nov. 20 editorial.

"Revenue Stream" claims removal of the dams could restore fish runs and save billions of dollars, and that the clean, renewable power generated by the dams could be replaced by conservation and wind power.

The truth is that removing the Snake River dams will do little to help salmon and steelhead stocks listed as threatened or endangered, but it is certain to devastate our region's economy.

"Revenue Stream," sponsored by a coalition of environmental and fishermen's organizations, is little more than a mix of cherry-picked data from old and discredited studies, with some unscientific analysis thrown in.

For example, the report claims to rely heavily upon the 2002 environmental impact statement from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. However, it ignores this very study's conclusion, which is that dam breaching by itself would not result in the recovery of listed species, would cost more than \$1 billion to accomplish and would take nine years to implement.

"Revenue Stream" also disregards current scientific studies that show salmon restoration efforts are working. A study released by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration last month states that in 2006, the highest survival of young fish traveling downstream through the dams was observed. Returning adult fish passage is 98 percent or higher.

In fact, survival through the Snake and Columbia Rivers is as high as it was in the 1960s - before construction of the Snake River dams. It is often overlooked that salmon runs were devastated through commercial over-harvest well before the dams were in place. These are facts, not hyperbole.

There also is no science or data in the report to back up the claim that dam removal would restore the region's listed fish. For the 13 listed stocks, removal of these dams would do nothing to aid nine of the species that do not migrate in the Snake River.

The report states that these dams generate little power. Totally false. The four Lower Snake dams have a generating capacity of 3,033 megawatts, enough to power the city of Seattle. Nor can this generation be replaced by wind and conservation.

Reliable hydropower is what keeps electricity flowing when the wind isn't blowing. Conservation reduces load and cannot be used to meet new growth. The clean, renewable power produced by these dams is vital to our growing region, and removing them would require building five new large coal plants or three nuclear plants.

In the ultimate ironic twist, the report's authors hope to create revenue by expanding the salmon-harvesting industry. Imagine spending billions to remove dams and replace 3,000 megawatts of a renewable resource, and then allowing fishermen to kill the fish we are trying to save.

Most disappointing is that some are accepting "Revenue Stream" at face value. The analysis is flawed, with no regard for current scientific information or the limited benefits of removal to listed stocks and great damage to our economy.

"Revenue Stream" does a great disservice to the public and to those working on sensible solutions to assist in the recovery of endangered salmon and steelhead.

Terry Flores of Portland is executive director of Northwest RiverPartners, a coalition of river users and interests including regional utilities, businesses and agriculture.