

Contact:
Deston Nokes
Northwest RiverPartners
503-789-2808

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Misguided Salmon Planning Act seeks to study removing dams

PORTLAND, Ore. — A new bill calling for a study of lower Snake River Dam removal is ill-conceived and a needless distraction from real efforts to help fish, according to Northwest RiverPartners.

“This bill is completely disingenuous,” said Terry Flores, executive director of Northwest RiverPartners. “It purports to be about salmon recovery, and mentions the other factors affecting fish survival, but the bill focuses primarily on removing the dams.

“If this were a genuine study on the biological effectiveness of fish recovery, the bill also would look at harvest, habitat and hatcheries, but that doesn’t fit the authors’ agenda.”

Authored by American Rivers, and sponsored by U.S. Reps. Jim McDermott, D-Wash., and Tom Petri, R-Wis., the draft legislation requires National Academies of Science look at the biological effectiveness of recovery approaches, and a Government Accountability Office review of existing studies looking at partially or fully removing the four dams.

“This bill is not needed and will distract from existing efforts to help listed salmon and steelhead,” Flores said. “Removing the lower Snake River dams already has been studied and rejected as a means of restoring listed fish.”

In 2002, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers released a seven-year, independent, peer-reviewed Environmental Impact Statement that evaluated dam breaching and alternatives to helping juvenile salmon get past the four lower Snake River dams.

The Corps’ EIS called for fish mitigation measures around the dams, not dam removal. Many of the improvements recommended in the Corps’ study have since been installed or are on the drawing boards. Surface bypass collectors, behavioral guidance structures or removable spillway weirs have been installed at three dams with another coming this spring. Such bypass facilities will be installed at the remaining dams.

Such efforts are paying off. Recent research shows that downstream fish survival through the Snake and Columbia rivers is as high as it was in the 1960s, before the construction of the Snake River dams.

“Also, at a time when we’re trying to meet our regions’ growing energy needs, through renewable resource development and adding wind farms, removing clean, renewable hydropower makes no sense whatsoever,” Flores said.

“There’s simply no need for this bill. The studies have been done and we know the answers – dam removal interests simply don’t like them.”

Northwest RiverPartners is a coalition of regional businesses, utilities, farmers, ports and other river users dedicated to science-based, cost-effective improvements in salmon and steelhead recovery efforts, headquartered in Portland, Ore.