

## The real costs of removing four lower Snake River dams

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Carbon emissions and electric consumers' costs would both increase, according to a recent analysis of removing the four lower Snake River dams by the Northwest Power and Conservation Council. This is no great surprise considering that the Northwest's hydroelectric system keeps our carbon footprint at half that of the rest of the country, and is our largest source of affordable energy.

The lower Snake River dams alone produce 1,110 average megawatts of clean, renewable energy -- enough to power the city of Seattle -- and provide backup power to wind resources when the wind isn't blowing. Common sense suggests that removing such valuable resources would only add to carbon emissions and energy costs.

But the council's analysis puts a fine point on it, concluding: "Replacement of the lower Snake River dams ... results in increased carbon emissions of 3 million tons per year, a 7.6 percent increase." This is because more gas-fired plants would have to be built to take their place. And when power imported from gas and coal sources outside the Northwest is considered as well, the total increased emissions would be 6 million tons per year, the analysis reports.

To put 3 million tons of additional carbon each year in context -- this is five times greater than the expected carbon savings from state mandates requiring utilities to acquire wind and solar resources over the next decade. Removing the dams would wipe out -- and then some -- any long-term carbon savings from achieving state renewable standards.

Utility customer costs also would rise dramatically -- by more than half a billion dollars in 2020 and remain at that level or higher in future years -- according to the analysis. "Bonneville public-utility customers would bear the cost increases. Based on Bonneville's rate of \$28 per megawatt-hour, dam removal causes an increase of 24 percent to 29 percent." While individual family and businesses bills may vary, this represents a whopping future rate hike by any measure.

The council's analysis is compelling even though it does not estimate the billions of dollars it would cost to remove the dams, economic impacts on lost river trade and navigation, flood control, replacing barge transportation with thousands of carbon-emitting trucks and changes in

irrigation sources. Nor does it include the costs or carbon emissions of providing power alternatives to back up the rapidly growing wind resources when the wind isn't blowing.

Conservation advocates have taken portions of the analysis out of context to support their arguments for destroying the dams to somehow aid 13 listed runs of salmon and steelhead -- even though only four runs are even affected by the Upper Snake dams. They have attempted to characterize dam removal as having little effect on carbon emissions or costs to Northwest electricity consumers.

We, like them, believe we can have clean affordable energy and healthy salmon runs. But, it is just common sense that the Northwest's clean hydro power resources, including the four Snake River dams, are central to accomplishing these goals.

Saying otherwise just doesn't make it so.

*Terry Flores is executive director of Northwest RiverPartners.*