



Current Reflections

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Economic and Renewable Value Lost in the Rhetoric

The Columbia and Snake River system supports our economy and keeps our air clean and our skies blue. In an era of consternation over global climate change, the value of our river system has never been more evident. Yet the drumbeat for dam removal continues and special interest groups are quick to dismiss the value of the dams as the region's premier source of clean renewable energy.

Just take a moment to consider some of the facts:

- Hydropower provides 61 percent of the electricity generating capacity in the Northwest. Two-thirds of the capacity is from federal hydro projects with 1200 megawatts of energy coming from the Snake River dams, enough to power a city the size of Seattle.
- According to the Northwest Power and Conservation Council, our clean renewable hydropower keeps the Northwest's "carbon footprint" at half that of the rest of the nation. Removal of the Snake River dams would add *5.4 million tons of CO₂* to the atmosphere *each year*.
- It also would take an additional 120,000 rail cars or more than 700,000 semi-trucks annually to move the cargo that now travels by barge. Although not considered in the Power Council's CO₂ analysis, that traffic would significantly increase greenhouse gases and stress already overtaxed bridges and highways.
- Columbia River navigation is far less polluting than other forms of transportation. Per ton-mile, barges use *40 percent* of the fuel required for rail and an astonishing *11 percent* of what is needed for trucks.
- Replacing the *energy* lost by Snake River dam removal would take at least two nuclear plants or three coal-fired or six gas-fired power plants, and almost double that to replace the *capacity* they offer to meet extreme power demands.



Tidewater Barge Photo

- Last November's floods provided a stark reminder of the value of the dams in protecting towns and cities from such events. During the disastrous floods of 1996, dam operators were able to work together to control floodwaters and reduce damage by an estimated *\$3.2 billion*.

While the renewable, clean energy side of the equation is impressive, the economic piece is no less compelling:

- The river transportation system supports *\$15 Billion* in international trade, ranking first in the country for exports of wheat and barley and first on the West Coast for forest and paper products.
- Barges bring economic vitality to ports as far inland as Lewiston, Idaho. Containers traveling the Columbia and Snake River system bring goods to consumers in *43 states*.
- Crops are the backbone of the Northwest's food processing industry which is the largest manufacturing employer in Idaho, second largest in Washington and the third largest in Oregon.

These are just a few of the facts. They must not be lost in the emotional rhetoric as we work to recover the region's salmon. While detractors of the basin's hydro projects call for dam breaching and operations that rob the system of its value, sensible solutions exist -- and are being implemented to benefit our fish and protect the river system's value to Northwest businesses and families.

The information for this *Current Reflections* came from the following sources: Pacific Northwest Waterways Association website, www.pnwa.net; a December 11, 2007 guest [article](#) in *The Columbian* by Don Brunell, Association of Washington Businesses, and a November 2007 report by the Northwest Power and Conservation Council, "[Carbon Dioxide Footprint of the Northwest Power System.](#)"

Northwest RiverPartners is a partnership of farmers, electric utilities and large and small businesses in the Pacific Northwest, joined together to ensure that the Columbia and Snake rivers remain living, working rivers. It was founded on the belief that these rivers are the Northwest's greatest natural resource providing residents with clean, affordable and renewable electricity, flood control, irrigation for our farm lands, healthy fish and wildlife, maritime trade, and a multitude of recreational opportunities. For more information, please visit www.nwriverpartners.org.