



Current Reflections

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RiverPartners invited to testify before House Committee

A Congressional committee recently heard extensive testimony on the collapse of the ocean salmon season off the California and Oregon coasts. Northwest RiverPartners was invited to testify at the May 15 hearing before the U.S. House Committee on Natural Resources, Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife and Oceans. Issues covered before the subcommittee included testimony on salmon and steelhead runs on the Columbia and Snake River system, and dam breaching. James Litchfield testified on behalf of Northwest RiverPartners. The following is excerpted from his testimony.

The false promise of breaching Snake River dams

You will probably hear that to save Snake River salmon and steelhead the Lower Snake River Dams should be removed. Dam removal is a “silver bullet” advocated by those that believe the construction of the four dams on the Lower Snake River caused all the problems that led to Endangered Species Act (ESA) listings for salmon and steelhead.

Yet, one of the biggest problems with proposals to remove the Snake River dams is the limited scope of this strategy. Even if the dams were removed, it would only potentially help four of the thirteen ESA-listed fish in the Columbia River Basin. Removing the Snake River dams is an expensive and controversial strategy that could require so much time and money that it would leave the other nine ESA-listed stocks without significant support.



One of the four dams on the Snake River

Removal of dams also couldn't be achieved quickly. Years of political and legal battles will be fought and, even if there is the political will, Congress would need to appropriate significant funds to pay for removal of the four dams, estimated to be over \$1 billion. During the decades of fighting, recovery actions will not be pursued because of the uncertainty that the dams may be removed at some time in the future.

The four Lower Snake Dams also produce more than 1,020 MW of carbon free energy and 2,650 MW of sustained power production capacity. These are significant quantities of power production that can serve the needs of a large city the size of Seattle. You will hear that the energy lost from the dams could be replaced by wind and conservation. This is simply not true. Calls for removing the four Lower Snake dams led the Northwest Power and Conservation Council (Council) to evaluate the possible consequences of removing the Snake River Dams to the region and the environment.

The Council's analysis showed that the lost renewable power produced by the dams could not be replaced by power from conservation and new renewable resources, such as wind generation.

This is because all available conservation and renewable power generation is already allocated to meeting future regional load growth in the Council's regional power plan, and will be acquired with or without dam removal. For this reason, the Council found that if the Snake River dams were removed, the most likely replacement resource would be gas-fired combustion turbines that emit significant quantities of carbon dioxide. In the context of efforts by the region to reduce our carbon footprint, the Council found that, "discarding existing CO₂-free power sources has to be considered counterproductive."

The Council's analysis specifically showed that if the Snake River dams were removed it would result in increased power production from new gas-fired combustion turbines and by other thermal power plants in the western United States. The new fossil fueled power that replaces the dams would cause the release of 5.4 million tons of CO₂ per year. For perspective, this is equivalent to the CO₂ produced by a 540 MW new modern coal plant.

As a matter of sound science or good public policy it makes no sense to remove renewable, non-polluting power from the Snake River dams and replace the lost renewable power with fossil fired power plants that accelerate global climate change. Unfortunately, the campaign to remove the dams has diverted significant time and resources from moving forward with the recovery efforts that our region really needs to implement.

James Litchfield frequently provides strategic and technical advice concerning the state of the latest scientific findings on salmon recovery and potential strategies to achieve recovery and delisting goals. As one of a team of seven scientists on the Snake River Salmon Recovery Team Litchfield worked on developing a recovery plan for the endangered salmon stocks in the Snake River. [Read Litchfield's entire testimony.](#)

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.nwrivernpartners.org.