

## Policy & Factual Points for Breaching the Four Lower Snake River Dams



- The four Lower Snake River dams with their warm slack water reservoirs are killing what is left of the salmon and the river.
- By 1999 the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) had determined that to recover ESA-listed Snake River spring/summer Chinook, the ***most risk averse action*** would include dam breaching, a harvest moratorium, and vigorous improvements in habitat and hatcheries.
- By 1999 NMFS' results demonstrated that for the ESA-listed Snake River fall Chinook and steelhead, ***dam breaching by itself would likely lead to recovery.***
- In 2002, after conducting a seven year, \$33 million dollar study, the [Army Corps of Engineers' analysis](#), p. 25, showed that ***breaching the dams had the highest probability of meeting the government's salmon survival and recovery criteria***, while employing ***the other so-called "reasonable" alternatives would be slightly worse than doing nothing.*** Nevertheless, the Corps implemented the ***"slightly worse than doing nothing"*** alternatives and has been on a spending spree since, wasting approximately \$1 billion of ratepayer and taxpayer money on hardware improvements and juvenile transportation around the dams over the last 14 years.
- The ESA-listed Snake River salmon runs are in worse shape today than in 2002.
- Federal fisheries biologists' research shows that lower Snake River wild salmon runs are on the verge of collapse, due to the near complete elimination of their wild genetics.
- Within the United States, the Columbia-Snake River watershed is the most important source of salmon for the endangered Puget Sound orcas.
- In its *2008 Recovery Plan for Southern Resident Killer Whales*, ***NOAA Fisheries*** underscored the importance of this watershed to the orcas, stating that, ***"[p]erhaps the single greatest change in food availability for resident killer whales since the late 1800s has been the decline of salmon from the Columbia River basin."***
- The endangered orcas forage in the coastal waters of the Northeast Pacific Ocean more than half the year. According to satellite tags, the orcas' travels often center around the mouth of the Columbia River when Snake River Chinook are returning to the Columbia.
- The births of eight surviving orca calves between December 2014 and January 2016 coincided with larger Snake River hatchery salmon runs that occurred in 2013 through 2015, in association with a hatchery research project that greatly inflated the runs. Although the research project has ended, it provides good evidence that when there are plentiful Snake River Chinook, the endangered orcas can conceive, reproduce, survive and recover.
- Breaching the dams would be the single measure most likely to recover abundant salmon and steelhead in time to enable the endangered Puget Sound orcas to survive.

- Based on a revised channel bypass breaching plan, ***in 2016 dollars the costs of breaching all four dams is \$340 million.***
- ***If and when breaching takes place, BPA, and perhaps the Corps, will be responsible for the costs of breaching, not Washington State.***
- The return on investment for BPA ratepayers and federal taxpayers is 15 cents on every dollar invested in the lower Snake River dams. This is a bad investment. Breaching the dams will save money for taxpayers and ratepayers.
- The regional power grid currently produces a 16 percent annual surplus.
- If the four lower Snake River dams are taken offline, there will be little risk of blackouts. There should be no need to build additional power generating facilities, because increases in energy efficiency should meet all load growth for the next 20 years. Northwest Power Council, *Seventh Power Plan*.
- Hydropower is not clean energy and is not free of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. The dams are destroying the lower Snake River ecosystem. Further, GHG emissions are known to come from both reservoirs and water outgassing while passing through the dams.
- Snake River barge traffic is being replaced by rail transport at a lower overall cost and a similar carbon footprint.
- Public subsidies can make grain shippers whole at a cost of \$7.6 million per year. This provides more flexibility in transport and is far less expensive than the public subsidies to barging grain down river.
- Breaching the dams will increase recreation expenditures in the six counties adjacent to the lower Snake River by at least \$400 million annually. This will support between 3,000 and 4,000 jobs in the surrounding counties.
- The four Lower Snake River dams are run of the river dams and do not provide flood control. Lower Granite Dam creates an increased flood risk to Lewiston, Idaho.
- There are an estimated 37,000 acres of industrial farmland irrigated by the reservoir behind one dam, Ice Harbor. Irrigation pumps could be replaced and pipes extended to the Snake River, or the land could be converted to non-irrigated farmland or pasture. Either option would cost far less than maintaining the salmon-killing dams.
- The recent Ninth Circuit decision in *United States v. Washington*, No. 13-35474, 2016 U.S. App. LEXIS 11709 (9th Cir. June 27, 2016), held that both Washington State and the United States governments are liable to signatory tribes for blocking or impeding salmon migration in violation of the 1855 Stevens Treaties. This exposes the United States and potentially Washington State to huge damages liability to the tribes, if the dams continue to be maintained. This liability can be cut off by breaching the dams this year.
- ***If the dams were breached and some of the valuable reclaimed land were conveyed to the State of Washington, proceeds from the sale or lease of such land could go into state school budgets, where it is greatly needed.***