

Jaime Pinkham
Office of the Assistant Secretary of the Army (Civil Works)
108 Army Pentagon, Room 3E446, Washington, DC 20310-0108

5/12/2021

Re: Proposal for Executive Action to deactivate the lower Snake River Dams

Dear Mr. Pinkham,

Attached is a letter sent to the White House Chief of Staff Ron Klane. In it we are requesting that President Biden take action this year to end a never-ending debate over the four Lower Snake River Dams (LSRD's) in Eastern Washington, for which I am sure you are familiar.

While we realize this action is clearly within the authority of your office and or the command structure of the Corps to make, White House support is paramount.

The Northwest has been in a quagmire of conflicting regional policies, beliefs, and "power" politics over the fate of tribal obligations, hydropower, salmon, and rate payers. Notably, Bonneville Power Administration's (BPA) mission as a power marketing agency for federal hydropower is now more than ever in conflict with its second primary role operating the major electrical grid in the NW. With prices dropping rapidly for renewables they are competing with hydropower which is now more expensive. BPA's unwillingness to divest underperforming dams, such as the LSRD's, is robbing money from the grid and large storage dams that play an essential role of balancing substantial amounts of wind and solar while taking advantage of the cheaper renewables to "charge" the storage dams. Another conflict is the widely held belief in the Northwest that the operation of all federal dams is "mandated" by congressional authorization. This facilitates the belief by BPA that they must operate all the hydropower projects regardless of cost. Indeed, the Northwest Power and Conservation is spending \$12 million to update power adequacy and renewable models based on market fundamentals yet is not allowing hydro project costs to be modeled. While costs of renewables are modeled, hydropower costs are not leaving the region ill informed as to these future costs. These costs are of course, rising.

Optimizing federal Hydro-power by decommissioning underperforming projects and upgrading the grid allows far faster interconnection of 1,000's of MW's of wind, solar, and battery resources, at cheaper costs to rate payers. Breaching the LSRD's immediately frees up over 3,000 MWs of transmission capacity for renewables awaiting BPA interconnection. Breaching also eliminates significant methane emissions from the reservoirs and accelerate the retirement of coal plants with a net increase in energy related jobs.

However, deactivating these dams will not happen if left to regional decision makers. The rate payers and public at large cannot grasp and properly respond to the mass of conflicting positions. As Mona Charon the political analyst and columnist recently wrote, "When enough people in authority tell lies, they cripple their audience's capacity to reason."

Since the decision is within the authority of the Executive Branch, we have asked President Biden to weigh in on this action and secure them this year by breaching the earthen portions to drain the reservoirs. In previous briefings with assistant secretary Jo Ellen Darcy and Lowry Cook, they confirmed the Corps policies that provide the means to place the LSRD's into a non-operational status. I am sure you realize this is within authority of the Corps field commanders or more likely in this case, your office.

Immediate breaching will save endangered salmon and orcas, address tribal treaty violations and social inequities, build climate change resiliency, and add much needed jobs for rural Americans. It is also technically feasible and executive in a matter of months, not years.

I have personally briefed CEQ staff during the Obama and Trump Presidencies, only to be advised that there was no definitive support from the Northwest Congressional Delegation or Environmental groups for immediate breaching. An action clearly within the responsibilities and authorities of the Executive Branch. Instead, the "Players" in the Northwest have been satisfied with litigation, expensive and fruitless spilling of water over dams for juvenile salmon, more studies and endless collaboration among special interest groups.

In the past I have briefed the ASA(CW) and staff and request a meeting to brief you on the specifics that show not only the benefits of immediate breaching but the feasibility as well.

We realize you are dealing with many difficult issues, but we implore you to ensure this issue stays elevated and that we are taking immediate action. Please realize that referring this action to Northwest Division or the USACE Regional Integration team will only in result in the same inaction that has offered in the last 20 years. Since you may not be familiar with specifics and conditions requiring such action, I request that we meet.

In the meantime, I am also attaching two documents, also provided to your predecessors, which summarize the costs of breaching and full mitigation. I note that the Corps cost is a tiny fraction of what the authors are proposing for Congressman Simpson's concept, ie., billions of dollars. The 5 Means Papers discusses the policies surrounding the authorities, NEPA, the federal court case, BPA financing, and breach feasibility.

Thank you for your attention in this critical matter.

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