A New Vision for the Northwest





The Northwest can have a healthy economy, affordable and clean energy, and wild salmon swimming in our rivers. But we need to act soon in order to realize this new vision.

The Columbia and Snake River Basin was once the most prolific salmon watershed on the planet, with upwards of 30 million salmon returning to the Basin each year. In their journals, Lewis and Clark wrote of Northwest rivers so full of salmon that you could have walked across on their backs; lakes nestled high in the mountains of Idaho were named for the deep red color some salmon turn as they find their way back home to spawn.

After the four federal dams on the lower Snake River were completed in the mid-1970s, Snake River salmon and steelhead populations plummeted by more than 90 percent. Today, Snake River coho salmon are now extinct and all remaining Snake River salmon and steelhead are listed for protection under the Endangered Species Act.

Scientists have consistently argued that, while not a silver bullet, removal of the four dams on the lower Snake River is essential to the protection and restoration of Snake River salmon and steelhead – the river system that once produced almost half of all the salmon and steelhead in the Columbia- Snake Basin. The Western Division of the American Fisheries Society (AFS), the oldest and most renowned association of fisheries professionals in the nation, has stated that "the benefits of Snake River stock recovery would be assured with the removal of the lower four dams on that [river]," and has endorsed their removal.

Removing the lower Snake River dams will require changes in how we produce energy and get our goods to market. But these four costly and outdated dams are holding back the Northwest economy. Removing them will bring new economic opportunities to the region that could help rejuvenate rural communities from the mouth of the Columbia to the mountains of Idaho, and up and down the Pacific Coast, from California to Alaska.

Dam Removal Will Bring Clean, Innovative Energy and Jobs to the Region

Removing the four lower Snake River dams will provide an opportunity to broaden and diversify the Northwest's energy portfolio and to bring new, long-term jobs to the region.

Several recent reports have shown that the Northwest has the potential to replace the power generated by these four dams, meet our future energy demands, and reduce CO2 emissions – all while lowering electricity bills. Most notably, the NW Energy Coalition in its report *Bright Future: How to keep the Northwest's lights on, jobs growing, goods moving and salmon swimming in the era of climate change*, shows that the Northwest has ample clean, renewable energy sources and energy efficiency to meet its future energy demands, reduce its 1990 carbon emissions by 15% by 2020 (and 80% or more by 2050), retain a healthy economy, and remove the four lower Snake River dams to restore wild salmon.

The RAND Corp. also did an analysis of what removing the four lower Snake River dams would mean for the Northwest's energy portfolio and economy. RAND's analysis shows that removing the dams can positively influence the Northwest's economy, creating nearly 15,000 long-term jobs.

But the good news doesn't end there. The Northwest Power and Conservation Council's Sixth Power Plan, released in 2010, underscores many of the findings in Bright Future. The Council's plan shows that the region can meet its growing energy needs almost entirely with energy efficiency and new renewables and with no net increase in greenhouse gas emissions. In addition, the Council's analysis lays to rest the notion that Northwest energy users would be economically devastated by removal of the four lower Snake dams to protect and restore salmon and salmon-based communities.

The Council's analysis shows that the region would need to identify only about 345 megawatts (MW) of additional power to effectively replace the dams' output should the dams be removed. Dam removal would **not** require develop-

ment of 3,000 MW of new electricity or the corresponding 20% rate increase, as some naysayers claim.

While customers' rates would increase 2-4%, people's actual electric bills – the things we pay – would significantly go down over the next 20 years due to improvements in energy efficiency, even with the removal of the dams.

Removing the four lower Snake River dams could allow the Northwest to be a model for the rest of the country by protecting its natural resources and building a clean, innovative energy future.

Grain and Other Goods Will Move Efficiently by Rail and Truck

The Northwest needs thriving fishing and farming communities if it is to have a healthy regional economy. That's why salmon advocates support measures that will ensure reliable, cost-effective ways to ship goods to market after the removal of the four lower Snake River dams.

Right now, the lower Snake River dams impound enough river to make Lewiston, Idaho – 465 miles inland from the ocean – a small sea port. With these dams removed, grain can continue to move on an improved rail system and via barge on the Columbia River.

Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway (BNSF), which operates much of the rail system in the Northwest, has analyzed its ability to both move grain produced in the region to market and to do so in a cost-effective manner. BNSF states that it has the capacity to move 94 percent of all the grain produced in Washington to market and that it could do so in a manner that is "fully competitive with existing transportation requirements."

With upgrades to the region's shortline rail system and modest upgrades to rail-served grain elevators, grain transportation can be more efficient and reliable than it is today. In fact, investing in these rail improvements can also help ensure that farmers are able to charge reasonable rates for specialty grains, a situation not always possible with current transportation facilities. It's time to invest in our rural transportation system.

Farmland Will Remain Productive

Only one of the four lower Snake River dams, Ice Harbor, provides irrigation to farmers. Fewer than 20 pumps take water from this part of the river for just 13 farms. The farmlands irrigated with this water amount to about 2% of the irrigated farmland in Washington. Farmers would still be able to irrigate with the removal of Ice Harbor dam; to reach the lower river level, it would be merely be a matter of extending existing irrigation pipes about 100 feet to meet the river's new height.

The costs associated with this change should be shared by taxpayers so they are not shouldered by the farming community. This investment in the region's farm economy pales next to the ongoing cost of retaining the four lower Snake River dams while mitigating their enormous impacts on fish, and would, in the long run, save money, farms, and wild salmon.

Creating New Economic Opportunities

America cannot afford to pass up an opportunity that would generate billions of dollars every year and create thousands of long-term jobs for the Northwest and beyond. Removing the four lower Snake River dams will do more than restore salmon and steelhead to the Columbia and Snake River Basin; it will also protect our nation's heritage, restore more than 140 miles of river (providing world-class whitewater recreational opportunities), allow for innovative new technologies, and restore economic and environmental balance to the Northwest.

Various studies have shown that the removal of these four dams will bring economic vitality to the region and produce new, family-wage jobs. RAND Corp., Ben Johnson Associates, the NW Energy Coalition, Taxpayers for Common Sense, and others have all reached the same general conclusion: removing these dams saves money, increases jobs, and brings billions of dollars into the regional economy. It's a true win-win-win.

HOW DO WE GET THERE?

This vision isn't a pipe dream and it isn't rocket science. It simply requires that the region's stakeholders come together, evaluate their needs, and commit to common-sense solutions that keep communities whole. The region has done it before, and we're doing it today. Just look at the Elwha dams, or Marmot Dam, or even Condit Dam. We can choose different directions and ensure that communities have new, economically viable opportunities even after removing these outdated dams.

Let's sit down and talk about what we need and reach an agreement that provides the region with a future of economic prosperity, clean and innovative energy, increased jobs, and rivers teeming with wild salmon.

For more information, please contact:
Nicole Cordan, Policy & Legal Director
nicole@wildsalmon.org or
503.230.0421 x12

Save Our wild Salmon

Save Our Wild Salmon *is a nationwide coalition of conservation organizations, commercial and sport fishing associations, businesses, river groups, taxpayer and clean energy advocates working collectively to restore healthy, sustainable wild salmon to the Pacific Salmon states.*