

Testimony of:

Capt. Paul D. Amos
President
Columbia River Pilots
13225 North Lombard Street
Portland, OR 97203
(503) 289-9924
amos@colrip.com
www.colrip.com

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The Future of the US-Canada Columbia River Treaty - Building on 60 years of
Coordinated Power Generation and Flood Control

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Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee,

Good morning. My name is Paul Amos, and I am the elected President of the Columbia River Pilots. River pilots are licensed by the State of Oregon to provide pilotage services for the maritime industry. Pilots possess the extensive local knowledge and ship-handling skills necessary for commercial and governmental vessels of all types and sizes to safely transit roughly 350 nautical miles of the Columbia and Willamette Rivers. These vessels are piloted in all kinds of weather, at all hours of the day and night, 365 days a year. River pilots have been engaging in this demanding profession for over 150 years, through one of the most lengthy and demanding pilotage grounds in the world. I spent 10 years of my career, before I was a River Pilot, as a towboat captain on the inland system and have been continuously employed on the system since 1974.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide the perspective of the navigation community in the Northwest as it relates to the Columbia River Treaty.

Background on the Columbia Snake River System

Our nation's economy relies on a safe, efficient and cost-effective multi-modal transportation system. That system includes road, rail, air and water.

The Columbia Snake River System is a critical piece of the nation's water portfolio, providing benefits not just to the Pacific Northwest, but far into the heartland of our country. We are an export heavy system, and play an important role in balancing the nation's trade deficit. The Columbia River is the nation's number one gateway for the export of wheat, and second for soy exports. We also lead the West Coast on wood exports and mineral bulk exports. My

colleagues and I pilot between 1,400 and 1,500 vessels each year with a total of approximately 4,500 ship movements per year on this busy waterway.

The Columbia Snake River System is essentially a river highway. It includes our 105-mile deep draft Columbia River channel from Astoria to Portland, Oregon. From there, a 360-mile inland barging channel stretches from Portland, Oregon to Lewiston, Idaho, with a series of eight locks along the way. These are the highest lift locks in the United States, and are among the highest in the world, with the John Day lock topping out at 110 feet. There are also three large jetties at the Mouth of the Columbia, hundreds of pile dikes, and many other critical pieces of federal and port-owned infrastructure which ensure safe navigation and the free flow of trade.

Over 42 million tons of international trade moved on this waterway in 2010, valued at over \$20 billion. A conservative estimate of the jobs directly tied to the deep draft navigation channel finds that 40,000 individuals rely on this waterway for their livelihood. This economic benefit is expected to increase in the future, supporting even more jobs as additional companies make use of the river system.

This waterway is a significant federal navigation infrastructure asset, and any potential changes which may impact its efficiency should be evaluated thoroughly. Substantial federal investments have been made in both the deep draft Lower Columbia River as well as the inland barging channel and locks. The entire region pulled together to support the recently completed \$200M Columbia River channel deepening project. We also celebrated \$60M for three new downstream lock gates on the inland system, and significant Columbia River jetty repairs in the last decade. A major rehabilitation of the Columbia River jetties is on the horizon, along with additional lock investments and ongoing annual maintenance dredging on the Lower Columbia and at the Mouth of the Columbia.

Columbia River Treaty Concerns

The Northwest navigation community sincerely appreciates the efforts of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps), Bonneville Power Administration (BPA), and the select representatives from the region who have given many hours of their time on the Sovereign Review Team (SRT). We recognize the efforts of the Corps and BPA to construct a review process to provide a regional recommendation in the time available.

Throughout the Columbia River Treaty review process, the navigation community has called for recognition of the interconnected nature of flood risk management, flows for ecosystem benefit, and the ability to provide the federally authorized navigation channel and river conditions which will allow for safe and reliable navigation.

Navigation stakeholders are most concerned with the assumption in the Draft Recommendation that existing spring and summer flows should be augmented through an expansion of present Treaty agreements. These augmented flows will increase shoaling which will, in turn, increase dredging costs and likely impact navigation safety. The document further suggests that these increased flows would be accompanied by lower flows in the fall and winter. This will provide even less water over which to navigate these increased shoals. Navigation stakeholders like me have repeatedly expressed our concern with higher flows in the spring and summer, and lower flows in the fall and winter. I will highlight a few reasons why these flow changes could present problems for navigation.

Potential Impacts to Federal Navigation Projects

I have personal experience with the increased sedimentation that occurs on the Columbia River as a result of higher spring and summer flows. The most recent example of the impact of high flows occurred in 2011. In November 2010, we celebrated the completion of the Columbia River channel deepening project. Just six months later, high river flows in 2011 resulted in severe shoaling that could not be adequately addressed by the level of funding provided to the Corps of Engineers' federal dredging program. For several years, the Corps has worked to address the shoals that developed in 2011. Unfortunately, this severe shoaling meant that the Columbia River Pilots had to institute restrictions on how deeply ships could safely draft in our river. When ships can't be fully loaded, Northwest goods are left on the docks, which impacts whether our farmers and other regional producers can compete in overseas markets. I am very concerned about the ability of the federal government to provide adequate funding to address similar shoaling events resulting from any changes to river operations.

In addition to the Columbia River channel, there are additional elements of federal navigation infrastructure which may be impacted by increased flows. The Columbia River pile dike system which helps guide the federal navigation channel and the movement of sediment is already in serious disrepair. This system would likely be undermined by higher flows that occur with greater frequency. We are also very concerned about any potential weakening of the base of the Columbia River jetties, the rubble-mound structures that protect the entrance to the system from powerful Pacific storms. A seven-year, \$257 million jetty rehab project will hopefully begin in 2014. Any impact to the jetty structures below the waterline would be devastating and costly to the ports and communities along the 465-mile Columbia/Snake river channel, and to a critical national transportation infrastructure investment.

Ability to Safely and Efficiently Navigate

Higher flows that occur more frequently will also hinder safe navigation, as well as the efficiency of barging in the federal navigation channel. I know from first-hand experience that high flows reduce the number of barges that can be safely handled by a towboat in swift currents, including around the dams where spill operations may be in effect. Higher flows for longer periods of time will undermine the ability of barge operators to move full tows, which will impact shipments of Northwest agricultural products, petroleum, and all other cargo handled on the Columbia Snake River System.

We are also concerned about the impact flows may have on deep-draft ship handling on the Lower Columbia River, the kinds of vessels my colleagues and I pilot. Higher flows in spring/summer will impact vessel handling, transit time, and the ability to safely anchor. Additionally, lower flows in the fall/winter will further reduce the available draft on the Lower Columbia River.

We appreciate the work of the Corps team over the past year to analyze potential impacts to navigation which would result from implementation of several of the flow regimes sought by some state and tribal members of the Sovereign Review Team. The desire of some for increased "ecosystem flows", and the reflection of this desire in early drafts of the regional recommendation with no reference to potential impacts to navigation and other authorized purposes, created great concern among many river system users. The current draft of the regional recommendation now notes that "potential impacts to other river uses and infrastructure such as navigation, bridges, and other transportation features" will be evaluated and addressed.

I also want to note that in the past few months we have been provided additional opportunities

to provide feedback to the U.S. Entity. The latest version of the Draft Recommendation, circulated by the U.S. Entity on November 26, 2013, represents an improvement from earlier drafts in its inclusion of the importance of Columbia River navigation to the region and the nation, and the concerns expressed by navigation stakeholders.

Moving forward, we would strongly recommend increased stakeholder involvement. It is critical that regional interests that would be impacted by changes to the river system – utilities, navigation, irrigators, and flood control authorities – have more opportunity to participate. These regional interests serve millions of Northwest residents through power delivery, facilitating trade routes for regional and national cargo, producing high-value crops, and protecting lives and businesses from floods. Their expertise is critical as proposed changes to river operations are contemplated.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I welcome any questions you may have.