

Written Testimony of

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*“The Federal Columbia River Power System:
The Economic Lifeblood & Way of Life for the Pacific Northwest”*
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Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Congressman Newhouse and McMorris Rodgers for holding this important hearing today.

I appreciate the opportunity to testify about the importance of protecting the Northwest’s hydropower dams and the economic and environmental benefits they produce for our region and the nation. About six years ago, as Chairman of the House Natural Resources Committee, I convened a similar hearing to discuss my legislation to protect the dams.

I am pleased with the Committee’s continued focus on this critical issue. BPA’s unsustainable financial situation requires a legislative solution aimed at putting a halt to ongoing litigation and shoring up the value of our region’s greatest carbon free hydropower resource. In addition, the Trump Administration can provide immediate policy leadership in the form of agency guidance and regulation that ensures dams and fish can coexist.

My testimony focuses on two basic points: (1) the need to advance House-passed, bipartisan legislation that uses best available federal science to effectively stop an unelected federal judge from running the river and halt edicts by extreme groups intent on misusing the ESA to remove dams; and (2) highlight the hypocrisy of those that downgrade hatchery salmon as inferior to so-called “wild” salmon. This is an issue that could really benefit from high-level Administration scrutiny.

The Importance of a Legislative Solution

First, I commend and strongly support your efforts to pass H.R. 3144 to “codify” the 2014 FCRPS biological opinion—supported by scientists, three Administrations, states, tribes, utilities, ports and many more. This bill is critical, not just to protect our region’s clean, reliable, renewable power generation and economic viability, but also to make clear that Congress plays an important role regarding the authorization of the multi-purpose dams and their legacy. The Senate needs to take this legislation up, pass it, and the Administration needs to sign it into law to end the uncertainty, get out of the courtroom, and allow the plan to protect the dams and salmon.

Administration Policy Leadership – “Hatchery” v. “Wild” ESA Salmon

Setting aside for a moment the role of dams, a continuing, troubling irony is that the vast majority of returning salmon to most areas of the Columbia and Snake rivers come from hatcheries. Hatcheries have been used for more than a century--decades longer than dams have been around—to mitigate and supplement salmon. Yet, some extreme groups that distinguish between so-called “wild” and “hatchery”-bred salmon, claim hatchery salmon are “inferior” or negatively impact “wild” salmon. They’ve filed ESA-related lawsuits to shut down successful tribal and state hatchery programs, which actually help recover salmon.

This flies in the face of a number of scientific studies and the ESA itself. For example, a 2012 peer-reviewed scientific study conducted by Columbia River Intertribal Fish Commission and Nez Perce tribal scientists in Johnson Creek near Idaho’s south fork of the Snake River, found that hatchery fish did *not* negatively impact the fitness of “wild” fish, and that hatchery fish can successfully boost salmon populations with little, if any, negative impacts. I have attached a full copy of that study to my testimony for the record.

Over a decade ago, 10 independent fisheries scientists representing a range of educational institutions and agencies found hatchery fish successfully reproduce in the wild, and found no evidence that they negatively impact “wild” salmon. In fact, they found that hatchery fish are *indistinguishable* when interbred with wild populations. I have also attached these findings, which cite more than two dozen scientific studies.

With technology such as DNA that wasn’t used when salmon were first listed, the Trump Administration would be wise to revisit and update its ESA policies and agency findings to ensure hatchery and “wild” salmon are treated the same for ESA listing and delisting purposes and recovery. A similar review of NOAA’s policies sanctioning harvest of ESA-listed salmon should also be conducted.

Many groups focus on declines of “wild” salmon, while primarily faulting dams for salmon declines, and look the other way as huge numbers of “wild,” ESA-listed salmon are harvested. In a recent report to the Northwest Power Council, NOAA acknowledged that as much as **19%** of Snake River steelhead, **43%** of Snake River fall chinook and **53%** of Lower Columbia fall chinook are now harvested in the ocean or in the river. These staggering numbers run contrary to the intent of the ESA. Hatchery salmon simply cannot be ignored when counting and recovering salmon.

Now is the time for Congress to step up and offer solutions such as HR 3144 that seek to protect a clean, reliable energy resource that continues to drive our region’s economy. It is also time for the Administration to provide policy leadership and put forth innovative solutions that ensure salmon and dams can continue to co-exist.