

Q & A about Lower Snake River Dam Removal

(referenced from www.wildsalmon.org)

Q: Haven't mitigation efforts restored wild salmon and steelhead populations to historic levels?

Contrary to repeated statements from federal agencies, most wild Snake River salmon and steelhead returns remain at about the same levels as when first listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) in the early '90s. 2016–2018 fish survival numbers and predictions for 2019 show steep declines in Snake River salmon and steelhead runs, deepening the threat to wild fish survivability and causing fishing closures that are impacting local recreation, economies, and access to fish as food. Wild Snake River salmon populations, primarily chinook, have been reduced from a once annual return of 5–8 million adults to 75,000 in 2017.

Science shows that lower Snake River dam removal is the best hope to restore salmon runs in the Basin. A 1998 report by federal, state, tribal, and independent scientists concluded that removing the dams results in an 80–100% probability of recovering chinook. A 2000 report from NOAA concluded that dam removal was the most biologically certain way to recover Snake River salmon.

While the four Snake River salmon and steelhead populations will benefit the most from the removal of the dams, it will also improve water quality and flow in the lower Columbia River, thus benefiting all 13 listed stocks that migrate through the Columbia. Furthermore, dam removal could free up funding for salmon recovery efforts elsewhere in the Columbia Basin.

Q. How are the salmon impacted by changing ocean conditions and climate change?

The best science shows us that the most effective way to ensure strengthened salmon returns in variable ocean cycles is to restore 140 miles of habitat in the lower Snake River migration corridor—and that begins with the removal of the four lower Snake dams. While dam removal is not the only solution, in combination with other actions, salmon populations will be better able to weather poor ocean cycles in good health—and truly thrive—when ocean conditions are good.

Thanks to high-elevation habitat in the mountain rivers and streams of Idaho, northeast Oregon, and southeast Washington, Snake River salmon and steelhead are well-positioned to survive and thrive in spite of climate change—but only if the four warm, predator-filled reservoirs on the lower Snake River are replaced with a cooler, swifter, free-flowing river.

Q: The four dams produce hydropower. Doesn't the Pacific Northwest need that power?

A: If Seattle had to rely on the four lower Snake dams for its power, it would have electricity shortages much of the year. The dams are relatively unreliable sources of power compared to

others in the federal Columbia River system. They have very little storage capacity and are almost totally dependent on the amount of snowpack and rate of runoff. While they have a collective generating capacity of 3,033 megawatts, their average yearly output is around a third of that.

Because of the unreliability of these four dams, the Northwest Power and Conservation Council's 6th Energy Plan shows that the region would only need to replace about 245 MWs of additional power to address the current output of these dams. The impact on customers' rates would be somewhere between 2–4% percent if spread throughout the region, refuting claims that dam removal would devastate ratepayers. Indeed, due to the energy efficiency in the plan, electricity bills are actually expected to go DOWN over the next 20 years.

Q: What effect would the dam removal have on the local economy and jobs?

A: Here's a little background—federal taxpayers and Northwest ratepayers have spent more than \$10 billion on salmon recovery efforts for fairly little in return. The current plan will cost an additional \$700 million to \$1 billion per year to continue the same general activities—which are not achieving sustainable salmon populations. The fishing industry has lost more than 25,000 jobs because of salmon declines in the Columbia-Snake Basin.

A [RAND Corp. analysis](#), as well as [one by a coalition of taxpayer, energy, fishing, and conservation groups](#), found that removing the Snake River dams may be cheaper in the long run than continuing to spend resources on the failed strategies of the past.

The coalition study found that as much as \$1.6 to \$4.6 billion could be saved with the removal of the four lower Snake River dams. RAND's analysis found that dam removal could produce as many as 15,000 new, long-term jobs. Lower Snake River dam removal could bring billions of dollars in increased economic benefits to the Northwest from expanded fishing (both sport and commercial), new river-based recreational opportunities, and non-recreational revenue.

Q: How would dam removal impact farmers and other agricultural activities?

A: Prior to the completion of the lower Snake River dams in 1975, grain and other products in the region were transported to market chiefly by rail and truck. Today, a large part of these products is transported by barge from Lewiston, Idaho or grain-loading facilities elsewhere on the lower Snake River. Recent studies have found that the 140-mile navigation channel created by the lower Snake River dams could be affordably and effectively replaced by upgrading the Northwest's railroad lines.

As for irrigators in the Columbia-Snake basin, removal of the dams could take pressure off upriver irrigators in Idaho. Currently, they are under an aggressive plan that requires they let more water remain in the river to mitigate the effects of the dams. The small amount of irrigated farmland along the lower Snake River could be managed by extending intake pipes to a free-flowing river. Similarly, dryland wheat farmers could retain an affordable, reliable transportation system if taxpayer savings from dam removal are invested in upgrades to railroads, highways, and Columbia River barge facilities.