

# POLICY NOTE

### **Key Findings**

- 1. Activists who want to destroy the four Lower Snake River dams say it would be cheap and easy, and very expensive.
- 2. WPC research finds it would cost \$200 million more a year to replace the environmental and energy benefits of the dams.
- 3. A NOAA Fisheries study found that the survival rate of young salmon that pass the dams is 96%.
- 4. The dams provide about 7% of Washington's electrical power, as much as all solar and wind generation combined.
- 5. Activists use solar energy replacement estimates based on panels in Arizona; in our Northwest climate solar panels would produce at least 30% less power.
- 6. A bill to protect the dams has passed the U.S. House and awaits action in the Senate.

# Congress considers bill to preserve the economic and environmental benefits of the Snake River dams

By Todd Myers, Director, Center for the Environment

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### Introduction

Advocates from the left-wing N.W. Energy Coalition and other activists want to destroy the four dams on the Lower Snake River. They claim replacing the energy produced by the dams would be cheap and easy. They also claim it would be expensive, which, they say, is good.

Although these claims are not a useful tool for public policy guidance, it illuminates the lengths some will go to in order to push an agenda even when the data are not on their side.

Washington Policy Center has analyzed these claims and found it would cost \$200 million more a year to replace the electricity and environmental benefits of the dams. A bill in Congress would preserve the dams and the many economic and environmental benefits they provide.

Following is a letter WPC sent to Congress providing studies and other support for legislation that would protect this important federal investment in our region.

## Letter on Snake River dam studies

Members of Congress:

June 19, 2018

The Senate will soon consider two policies regarding the four Lower Snake River dams in Washington state.

HR 3144, would adopt the current biological opinion on the dams and salmon recovery, passed the House 225-189 on April 25th. Additionally, language to protect the dams has been included in the Military Construction appropriations package.<sup>1</sup>

There is considerable debate about the economic value of the dams and their impact on salmon recovery. Although there is wide

<sup>1</sup> H.R. 3144, "To provide for operations of the Federal Columbia River Power System pursuant to a certain operation plan for a specified period of time, and for other purposes," passed the House of Representatives April 25th, 2018, Roll Call no. 153, United States Congress, at https://www.congress.gov/bill/115thcongress/house-bill/3144/all-actions?overview=closed&q=%7B%22roll-callvote%22%3A%22all%22%7D.

acknowledgement that destroying the dams would have large economic costs – in removing the dams, replacing the electricity, and in lost transportation options – some argue the benefit to a listed species is worth the high cost to the region.

Attached are four recent studies that discuss the question of the impact of the dams on salmon recovery and the cost of replacing the electricity.

#### 1. Fealty to symbolism is no way to save salmon - Peter Kareiva

Dr. Kareiva is a member of the National Academy of Sciences and served previously as Director of Conservation Biology at NOAA Northwest Fisheries Science Center

This paper argues that turning a complicated decision about hydropower, engineering solutions, hatcheries, harvest, habitat degradation, and salmon into a symbolic choice of "dams or fish" has hindered the discovery of portfolios of intervention and management that might actually solve the problem.

Dr. Kareiva notes, "It has become clear that salmon conservation is being used as a 'means to an end' (dam removal) as opposed to an 'end" of its own accord."<sup>2</sup>

# 2. ESA Recovery Plan for Snake River Spring/Summer Chinook Salmon – NOAA Fisheries

NOAA Fisheries' study notes that survival rates for salmon and steelhead are already very high.

"The recent operational improvements and passage route configuration changes at mainstem dams have already reduced juvenile mortality and injury rates, especially for Snake River steelhead. Survival studies show that with few exceptions, fish passage measures, including the use of surface passage structures and spill, are performing as expected and are very close to achieving, or have already achieved, the juvenile dam passage survival objective of 96 percent for yearling Chinook salmon and steelhead migrants..."

Removal of the dams would not reduce mortality to zero, meaning mortality gains would be extremely limited.<sup>3</sup>

### 3. The environmental tradeoffs of removing Snake River dams – Todd Myers, Washington Policy Center

The four Lower Snake River dams provide about seven percent of Washington's electricity, equivalent to virtually all of the state's wind and solar power. The cost

<sup>2 &</sup>quot;Fealty to symbolism is no way to save salmon," by Peter Kareiva, with Valarie Carranza, Effective Conservation Science, Chapter 15, Oxford University Scholarship Online, December 2017, at http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/ view/10.1093/oso/9780198808978.001.0001/oso-9780198808978-chapter-15.

<sup>3</sup> ESA Recovery Plan for Snake River Spring/Summer Chinook Salmon (Oncorhynchus tshawytscha) and Snake River Basin Steelhead (Oncorhynchus mykiss), by NOAA Fisheries, West Coast Region, U.S. Department of Commerce, November 2017, at http://www.westcoast.fisheries.noaa.gov/publications/recovery\_planning/salmon\_steelhead/ domains/interior\_columbia/snake/Final%20Snake%20Recovery%20Plan%20Docs/final\_snake\_river\_springsummer\_chinook\_salmon\_and\_snake\_river\_basin\_steelhead\_recovery\_plan.pdf.



Todd Myers is the Director of the Center for the Environment at Washington Policy Center. He is one of the nation's leading experts on free-market environmental policy. Todd is the author of the landmark 2011 book *Eco-Fads*: *How the Rise* of Trendy Environmentalism Is *Harming the Environment* and was a Wall Street Journal Expert Panelist for energy and the environment. Todd's research on the failure of "green" school mandates has stirred a reassessment of those requirements in school districts across the country. He currently sits on the Puget Sound Salmon Recovery Council and served on the executive team at the Washington State Department of Natural Resources. Todd also served as Director of Public Relations for the Seattle SuperSonics and Director of Public Affairs for the Seattle Mariners, and he holds a Master's degree from the University of Washington. He and his wife live in the foothills of the Cascade Mountains with two dogs and 200,000 honeybees.

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to replace that electricity, and the benefits it provides – it is dispatchable and emits very little carbon – would be significant.

Replacing the dams would cost hundreds of millions of dollars annually, both in replacement costs and lost environmental benefits. Those costs are borne by ratepayers and also result in lost revenue for other environmental projects.<sup>4</sup>

# 4. Errors and arbitrary assumptions plague study on replacing energy from Snake River dams – Todd Myers, Washington Policy Center

The anti-dam NW Energy Coalition recently funded a study claiming to demonstrate the cost of replacing electricity from the Snake River dams would be low. The study, however, manipulates the data in a number of ways. For example, none of the scenarios the authors study would replace all of the electricity from the dams.

Additionally, their costs for solar energy are based on estimates from Arizona, even though their study predicts the panels would be placed in southern Idaho, where the solar panels would be at least 30 percent less efficient. Finally, even though solar energy would only account for 22 percent of the replacement energy, the total amount of solar needed would be greater than the existing total solar generating capacity of Texas and Utah combined.<sup>5</sup>

In order to help salmon and the environment, we need to ensure our efforts are focused where they can make the most difference. Research demonstrates destroying the dams would be extremely costly and would do little to help salmon and steelhead populations.

Sincerely,

Todd Myers Environmental Director Washington Policy Center

<sup>4 &</sup>quot;The Environmental Tradeoffs of Removing the Snake River Dams," by Todd Myers, Environmental Director, Washington Policy Center, Idaho Law Review, 53 Idaho, L. Rev. 209 (2017), 2017, at https://www.washingtonpolicy. org/library/doclib/Todd-Myers-1--1.pdf.

<sup>5</sup> Errors and arbitrary assumptions plague study of replacing energy from Snake River dams, by Todd Myers, Environmental Director, Washington Policy Center, April, 6, 2018, at https://www.washingtonpolicy.org/publications/ detail/errors-and-arbitrary-assumptions-plague-study-on-replacing-energy-from-snake-river-dams.