

Scientists: Snake River dam removal 'necessary' to restore salmon

By ERIC BARKER
Lewiston (Idaho) Tribune

LEWISTON, Idaho — Another set of scientists, this one more than five dozen deep, is sounding the alarm over Snake River salmon and steelhead, saying if the imperiled fish are to be saved, the four lower Snake River dams must go.

On Feb. 22, 68 fisheries researchers from the Pacific Northwest released a letter penned to the region's congressional delegation, governors and fisheries policymakers methodically making the case for breaching the dams.

"This scientific recommendation wasn't taken lightly. This is relying on a review

of a large preponderance of information that a bunch of us analyzed over and over again over the years," said Howard Schaller, a retired fisheries research biologist who worked for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

They compared the lifecycle survival, known as smolt-to-adult survival rates, of Snake River salmon and steelhead, and note the runs, which must pass eight dams as they migrate to and from the ocean, have lower survival rates than similar stocks in the Columbia Basin that only have to make it past four or fewer dams.

For example, wild steelhead from the John Day River in Oregon have an average smolt-to-adult return rate of



Associated Press, File/Capital Press
Ice Harbor dam near Burbank, Wash., is one of four dams on the lower Snake River that would be taken out under a proposal by Rep. Mike Simpson, R-Idaho.

5% and wild chinook from the same river have a survival rate of 3.6%. The Northwest Power and Conservation Council has set a survival goal of 2% to 6% for anadromous fish runs

from the Snake and Columbia rivers.

At 2%, the runs replace themselves. At an average of 4%, they grow.

But the smolt-to-adult

return rate for wild Snake River steelhead is 1.4%, below replacement level, and for wild spring and summer chinook, it is just 0.7%.

The difference, they say, is caused by the number of dams and reservoirs each run encounters during juvenile migration to the ocean. For the fish from the John Day River, it's three dams. At each of the eight dams on the Snake River, fish face hardships, including delays caused by slowed water velocity, predation, injury and stress. The scientists point to research that indicates many of the young fish that make it past each of the eight dams succumb from delayed mortality, the result of accumulated stress and injuries incurred

along the way. "When all of the existing credible scientific evidence is taken into account, it is clear that removing the four lower Snake River dams, with adequate spill at the remaining lower Columbia River dams, is necessary to restore Snake River salmon populations," they write.

The work they cite was looked at during last year's Columbia River Systems Operation Environmental Impact Statement, authored by the Army Corps of Engineers, Bureau of Reclamation and Bonneville Power Administration. The agencies chose a plan that calls for water to be spilled at each of the dams during the juvenile migration period.

Washington wants Biden to overturn Hanford rule

By ANNETTE CARY
Tri-City Herald

RICHLAND, Wash. — The state of Washington and other groups are asking the Biden administration to overturn a Trump administration rule that would allow the federal government to potentially clean up the Hanford nuclear reservation to less stringent standards.

A letter sent on Friday, Feb. 26, to Jennifer Granholm, just a day after she was confirmed as energy secretary, was signed by leaders of Washington state, the Yakama Nation, the Natural Resources Defense Council, Hanford Challenge and Columbia Riverkeeper.

They call the Department of Energy's decision in 2019 to allow the reclassification of some Hanford site and other radioactive waste "a matter of extraordinary concern."

The new DOE rule, which was adopted to relax the interpretation of what is defined as high-level radioactive waste, "lays the groundwork for the Department to abandon significant amounts of radioactive waste in Washington state precipitously close to the Columbia River," the letter said.

It would create a long-term risk of harm to the residents of the Pacific Northwest and the natural resources critical to the region, it said. However, some Tri-Cities area interests have supported the revised interpretation of high-level radioactive waste, saying it could save billions of dollars in environmental cleanup money across the nation, making more money available for some of the most pressing environmental cleanup at the Hanford nuclear reservation. The Hanford Lifecycle report issued in 2019 estimated would require \$323 billion to \$677 billion to complete, say those who support the new interpretation.

Energy Communities Alliance — a nationwide coalition of local governments near DOE sites, including Hanford Communities — says the clarification to the definition of high-level waste could save the nation as much as \$40 billion while still being protective of the environment.

DOE told Congress that reclassifying waste could save up to \$210 billion at Hanford. Taxpayers have been spending about \$2.5 billion annually for Hanford environmental cleanup.

Under U.S. law, any waste produced when fuel irradiated at Hanford reactors was chemically processed to remove plutonium is classified as high-level radioactive waste. But internationally, waste classification is based not on how waste is produced, as it is for high-level waste in the United States, but on its radiological risk.

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