



PRESS STATEMENT

November 29, 2023
Vancouver, WA

Secret agreement between US government and anti-hydro plaintiff groups represents “Greatest Threat” for the region

Proposed US Government Commitments undermines clean energy and climate goals, negatively impacts the region’s economy and food production, raises electricity rates on struggling families, fails to address climate-friendly transportation and threatens grid reliability

Vancouver, Washington—November 29, 2023—Earlier today, the US Government’s “Commitments in Support of the Columbia Basin Restoration Initiative and in Partnership with the Six Sovereigns” (“USG Commitments”) [was made public by members of the Northwest Congressional Delegation](#). The Six Sovereigns include the State of Oregon, State of Washington, Nez Perce Tribe, Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation, Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, and the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation.

Our joint press statement is in response to the [public release of the USG Commitments](#). The USG Commitments spell out the terms of a proposed settlement over long-standing litigation surrounding the Federal Columbia River Power System (FCRPS) and the lower Snake River dams.

The USG Commitments are an outgrowth of a process that was supposed to support collaborative development of “a durable long-term strategy to restore salmon and other native fish populations to healthy and abundant levels, honoring Federal commitments to Tribal Nations, delivering affordable and reliable clean power, and meeting the many resilience needs of stakeholders across the region.” This document fails to meaningfully address any of these requirements. Instead, it undermines the future of achieving clean energy mandates and potentially raises the rates

of electricity customers across the region without addressing the true cause of salmon declines – the warming, acidifying ocean.

In a joint statement, the executive directors of Northwest RiverPartners, the Public Power Council, and the Pacific Northwest Waterways Association expressed extreme concern about the transparency of this process and the USG Commitments' impacts on millions of Northwesterners, "Our organizations have repeatedly looked for ways to find common ground with the plaintiffs' concerns during the mediation process, submitting numerous inputs, documents, and studies. Instead of working with all interests, the US Government chose for months to hold secret negotiations and refused to share any details with us, let alone allow our participation. It is not surprising, then, that this proposal turns its back on over three million electricity customers as well as the farming, transportation, navigation, and economic needs of the region. By purposely excluding our respective organizations from the negotiations, literally millions of Northwest residents were deprived of fair representation in this process."

Kurt Miller, executive director of Northwest RiverPartners said of the secret agreement, "These USG Commitments would be devastating to the millions of electricity customers across the region that depend on the affordability and reliability of hydropower. As written, it hands the keys to anti-hydro parties whose stated objective is to dismantle the entire system. The outcome would gut the region's decarbonization efforts. Higher energy prices will hurt the very same vulnerable groups that will be negatively affected by climate change."

Scott Simms, CEO and executive director of the Public Power Council said, "PPC and its non-profit member utilities believe these USG Commitments pose the single greatest threat to the vitality of the region's hydropower system we have ever faced. We are calling on the entire Northwest congressional delegation to stand up for the region's electric grid and the communities dependent on clean, reliable hydropower."

Neil Maunu, executive director of the Pacific Northwest Waterways Association, said, "We are extremely disappointed in the flawed process that led to these USG Commitments, which would eliminate shipping and river transportation in Idaho and eastern Washington and remove over 48,000 acres from food production. These USG Commitments threaten the

livelihoods of farmers, ports, and barging operators, and presents river system safety concerns in a way we've never seen before."

The USG Commitments go well beyond creating a roadmap for breaching the lower Snake River dams, establishing a plan that could demolish the capabilities of the entire

Federal Columbia River Power System. The document repeatedly requires the USG to consult and defer to plaintiff organizations without any requirement of engaging those reliant on the hydropower system and its many benefits. The USG Commitments notably exclude sideboards that would ensure the region's clean energy mandates are reached before any actions are taken that would reduce the CO₂-free generation provided by the dams. Further, the operational changes to the hydropower system are untested and leave many open questions about potential impacts. Contemplated additions of new "replacement resources" appear to not even come close to the reliable performance features of clean, renewable hydro projects.

These USG Commitments also fail to address the severe impacts of dam breaching on the region's ports, farmers, river users, and barging operators. Barging has remarkably low occurrences of injuries, fatalities, and spills, proving to be the safest cargo transportation method, surpassing rail and trucks. Barging stands out for its superior fuel efficiency and minimized emissions, underscoring the critical importance to this region and the fight against climate change. In addition, shifting commodity flows from barge to truck and rail – caused by the removal of navigation locks at the dams - will result in increases in harmful emissions by over 1,251,000 tons per year. ([FCS Group](#)) These harmful toxins are the equivalent of adding one large coal-fired power plant to the grid every two to three years.

The USG Commitments ignore scientific studies and rely solely on one unscientific NOAA policy document to justify spending billions of dollars. Climate change, especially the warming ocean, threatens salmon populations in rivers up and down the North American West Coast - whether or not dams are present. NOAA Fisheries' own peer-reviewed [study](#) predicts Chinook salmon populations will approach extinction within the next four years if the ocean continues to warm at its current rate. The Northwest's hydropower system is the greatest tool available to fight climate change. Destroying or diminishing the hydropower

system to chase false “solutions” is a lose-lose proposition for both people and salmon.

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About Northwest RiverPartners

Northwest RiverPartners is a not-for-profit, member-driven organization. Members include community-owned utilities, ports, labor, agriculture, and businesses from across the northwestern United States. The organization is focused on raising awareness about how the Northwest’s hydropower system betters communities and the natural environment and encourages science-based solutions that help hydropower and salmon coexist and thrive. <http://nwriverpartners.org>

About the Public Power Council

The Public Power Council, established in 1966, is an association that represents over 100 consumer-owned electric utilities in the Pacific Northwest. PPC’s mission is to preserve and protect the benefits of the Federal Columbia River Power System for consumer-owned utilities, and is a forum to identify, discuss and build consensus around energy and utility issues. For more information, please visit us on the web at www.ppcpdx.org.

About Pacific Northwest Waterways Association

The Pacific Northwest Waterways Association is a non-profit, non-partisan trade association of ports, businesses, public agencies, farmers and individuals who support navigation, energy, trade and economic development throughout the region. Learn more at www.pnwa.net