



Environmental Impact Statement P.O. Box 2870, Portland, OR 97208-2870 1-800-290-5033

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BUREAU OF RECLAMATION
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

BONNEVILLE POWER ADMINISTRATION
DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY

NEWS RELEASE

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Federal agencies decide the Columbia River System Operations environmental impact statement balances system purposes

Portland, Oregon - The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Bureau of Reclamation and Bonneville Power Administration signed a joint Record of Decision on Monday that commits the agencies to implementing immediate and long-term actions related to the ongoing operations, maintenance and configuration of 14 federal dams that compose the Columbia River System.

The plan includes actions that support continued, reliable water resource benefits and balances the purposes of the federal dams while specifically supporting ongoing and new improvements for species listed under the Endangered Species Act. The signing of the joint ROD accomplishes a priority item in the Presidential Memorandum on [Promoting the Reliable Supply and Delivery of Water in the West](#) issued in October 2018.

The ROD provides the agencies' reasoning for selecting the preferred alternative published in the Columbia River System Operations final environmental impact statement as the alternative for implementation and affirms the agencies' commitment to implement the NMFS and USFWS 2020 biological opinions.

"This selected alternative provides the best balanced and flexible approach to meeting the needs of the human and natural environment in the basin, both now and into the future. Our decision benefits the public interest, treaty resources and iconic fish species of the Pacific Northwest," concluded Brig. Gen. D. Peter Helmlinger, commander of the Corps of Engineers' Northwestern Division.

Through her assessment, Reclamation Regional Director Lorri Gray has determined that, "The selected alternative meets the purpose and need of the action and a majority of the EIS objectives, balancing the co-lead agencies' abilities to meet statutory project obligations while also complying with the requirements of the ESA, Clean Water Act and other applicable laws."

2 - Federal agencies release Columbia River System Operations draft environmental impact statement and preferred alternative

Key to the EIS process was the identification of mitigation actions to offset adverse impacts of the measures in the selected alternative and operation of the Columbia River System consistent with its congressionally authorized purposes. For example, BPA will fund additional protection and mitigation actions and will include those actions in its existing Fish and Wildlife Program.

“This process reflects our commitment to understanding all of the needs and interests related to the Columbia River Basin,” said acting BPA Administrator John Hairston. “We believe our decision today carefully balances the region’s needs for clean, reliable energy, supports the economic vitality of the communities that depend on the rivers, and includes durable actions that offset impacts on fish and wildlife affected by the Columbia River System.”

The co-lead agencies now are planning for implementation to ensure continued coordinated management of the system in a manner consistent with the selected alternative. The co-lead agencies will use the information garnered through the EIS development process to guide future decisions.

The CRSO EIS and joint Record of Decision represent the detailed work, evaluation and decision making of the agencies. The NEPA process and the EIS were completed with the input and assistance of many cooperating agencies with special expertise and/or authority over the lands and resources evaluated and with robust public and stakeholder engagement.

The agencies recognized that scientific integrity and independent review of the CRSO EIS and the methodologies used to conduct the evaluation were important to the process. Therefore, the agencies sought an independent technical review in addition to internal reviews conducted by agency staff and cooperating agencies. These multiple review layers helped to ensure sound evaluations and identified opportunities for clarity or where the draft information posed risk or uncertainty. Decision makers used these findings in considering alternatives and making a final selection. The results of these reviews are discussed in the EIS.

Background

Congress authorized the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and Bureau of Reclamation to construct, operate and maintain the 14 federal dams as one interconnected system to meet multiple specified purposes, including flood risk management, navigation, hydropower generation, irrigation, fish and wildlife conservation, recreation and municipal and industrial water supply. BPA is authorized to market and transmit the power generated by coordinated system operations.

Built and put into service between 1938 and 1976, the Columbia River System provides valuable social and economic benefits to the region.

- The system provides flood risk management to reduce the risk to lives, property and infrastructure during flood events.
- The river’s navigation system is an important component of the regional economy, allowing farmers to export grain and other crops grown in interior parts of the United States to overseas markets. Cruise line operators also use the river for tourism, a growing business on the Columbia and Snake rivers.

3 - Federal agencies release Columbia River System Operations draft environmental impact statement and preferred alternative

- The system is the source of economical, reliable and clean power generation and provides the region with some of the least greenhouse gas intensive electricity in the country. On average, the System produces 8,500 average megawatts of carbon-free power (equivalent to the power needs of eight cities the size of Seattle).
- The Columbia River and its tributaries provide water for millions of people throughout the river basin. Farmers depend on this water to irrigate crops that contribute to the national economy.

The final EIS includes a 52-page executive summary, which serves as an excellent synopsis of the information included in the larger final EIS document. The executive summary will help readers identify portions of the entire document they may want to focus on and read more about.

The recorded virtual signing ceremony, final EIS and joint Record of Decision are available on the project website: www.crsso.info. The final EIS can be found on EPA's searchable EIS database: <https://cdxnodengn.epa.gov/cdx-enepa-public/action/eis/search>.

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