

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

Support local collaboration and critical infrastructure
Support H.R. 3144

Dear Colleague:

We urge you to support H.R. 3144, a bipartisan bill to provide for operation of the Federal Columbia River Power System (FCRPS) and maintain current salmon mitigation measures as spelled out in the 2014 biological opinion (BiOp) until a court-ordered review of alternatives is complete. This legislation upholds the fifth and most comprehensive BiOp undertaken nationwide. After two decades of investments, billions of dollars of upgrades, habitat restoration efforts, and the largest fish reclamation program in the country, the FCRPS is experiencing record fish returns proving that dams and fish can co-exist.

The latest BiOp is an unprecedented example of local collaborative undertaken by the agencies, state governments, sovereign Northwest tribes, local governments, utilities, irrigators, and farmers. This collaboration led the Obama Administration to conclude that “The 2008 BiOp biologically and legally sound, is based on the best scientific information, and satisfies the ESA jeopardy standard.”[\[1\]](#)

Unfortunately, constant litigation continues to reject common sense. The Ninth Circuit granted a “spill order” on April 3rd that will cost an estimated \$40 million to ratepayers. Spill is the amount of water that goes over the dam instead through the turbines to produce electricity. This order requiring additional spill to the maximum gas levels is controversial as to the benefits and will likely increase power costs, decrease grid reliability, take away resources from other fish and wildlife restoration efforts, increase sedimentation, and ultimately may actually harm the very fish this spill is supposed to help.

For two decades the four Lower Snake River Dams have been targeted to supposedly help endangered salmon. The plaintiffs are seeking to increase the costs of dam operations in a veiled attempt to force their removal and unfortunately eliminate a carbon free alternative to natural gas power plants -- all in the name of endangered salmon and orcas. The National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration—the BiOp’s coordinating agency—stated that “no one salmon recovery action on a single river, such as breaching dams on the Snake, would itself bring about the recovery of Southern Resident killer whales.”[\[2\]](#) It is also important to note, that each of the four lower Snake River dams have an average fish passage rate of 97% and only four of the 13 Columbia Basin Salmon and Steelhead stocks migrate through the Snake River dams.[\[3\]](#)

While detractors of the legislation focus on harvesting an endangered species, they often ignore the other benefits. All four of these dams are multiple-use facilities that provide navigation, which facilitates a river barge system that enables over \$20 billion in trade and commerce. There are new recreation opportunities like the growing river boat industry out of the Port of Clarkston. And of course the carbon free, base load energy that can power a city the size of Seattle every year and can ramp up production to provide reliability that intermittent sources like wind and solar cannot.[4](#)

H.R. 3144 will simply keep in place the BiOp that was approved by the Obama Administration which requires the Bureau of Reclamation, BPA, and the Corps of Engineers to operate the system in a manner consistent with the Endangered Species Act, keeping the management of the system in the hands of the scientists and wildlife professionals and not the courts, until the completion of a new BiOp in 2022.

We ask that you support this critical legislation. If you have any questions please reach out to Andrew Neill with Congresswoman McMorris Rodgers or Chris Huckleberry with Congressman Schrader.

Sincerely,

CATHY McMORRIS RODGERS
Member of Congress

KURT SCHRADER
Member of Congress

[1] https://www.salmonrecovery.gov/Files/BiologicalOpinions/Appendix%201_09_10_09%20.pdf

[2] http://www.westcoast.fisheries.noaa.gov/publications/protected_species/marine_mammals/killer_w_hales/killerwhales_snakeriverdams.pdf

[3] <http://nriverpartners.org/value-of-snake-river-dams>

4 <https://www.bpa.gov/news/pubs/FactSheets/fs200901-Power%20benefits%20of%20the%20lower%20Snake%20River%20dams.pdf>