

Congressman Newhouse (WA-04)
House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Member Day Testimony
March 16, 2022
(5 minutes)

- Chairman DeFazio, Ranking Member Graves, and Members of the Committee,
- Thank you for hosting today’s Member Day hearing. It is my honor to be here representing my district in Washington state.
- For more than 30 years, misinformed interest groups have held Central Washington and the Pacific Northwest hostage by threatening to drain the lifeblood of our region.
- These groups are driven by a singular, ideological goal: breaching the Snake River dams. They have placed a bullseye on our river system and this critical infrastructure, which provides clean, carbon-free energy throughout the region, water for our crops, and transportation to move our goods to export markets.
- Millions spent in taxpayers’ dollars funded federal scientists, engineers, and fish experts in the Obama Administration to develop a years-long analyses fine-tuning the operations of the federal river power system. Putting this plan to work, our region continued to harness the power of our rivers for clean, carbon-free hydroelectric power while balancing the needs of our native salmon species.
- However, for organizations fixated on “free-flowing” rivers as the only means for achieving environmental success, it wasn’t enough. They sued the Obama Administration, then they sued the Trump Administration, and they continue today by suing the Biden Administration.
- Members of the Committee: Washington Governor Jay Inslee and Senator Patty Murray are now looking at your bill as a vehicle to waste taxpayers' dollars by forcing another duplicative study in order to seek their own desired outcome.

- Dam-breaching advocates have blinded themselves to the countless other benefits our dams provide for our region – not to mention the great strides our salmon populations have made over the last several years, even amidst rising ocean temperatures and record levels of pollution in the Puget Sound.
- If these interest groups were truly concerned with the river system, they would look at the science. They would acknowledge the *millions* of tons of carbon these dams prevent from entering our atmosphere. They would acknowledge our dams utilize world-class technology and engineering to support the most efficient production of carbon-free hydroelectricity while also improving fish passage to rates between 93 and 96 percent.
- While I could list data point after data point outlining the vast strides that have been made in preserving and restoring our native salmon populations, it can be better summed up by the four-year, federal environmental study released in 2020 that advised against breaching the four Lower Snake River Dams, which explicitly stated that the dams “are not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the ESA-listed species.”
- I would be remiss if I did not mention how our dams and the rivers provide a sustainable and efficient way to transport our nation’s crop exports. Barging on the Columbia and Snake Rivers keeps 700,000 semi-trucks off the roads – and their emissions out of the air – each year. The Columbia River alone barges more than 50% of U.S. wheat destined for export.
- It is clear that many of these dam-breaching proponents have long since stopped caring about the salmon nor the benefits of the river system. The fact that the Department of Justice announced a settlement to stay the most recent legal attack on the river system until July of 2022 –coincidentally, the same date Senator Murray and Governor Inslee announced they would release their dam-breaching plans – demonstrates a predetermined backdoor deal is in the works, and they intend to weaponize WRDA in order to achieve their desired outcome.
- For those of us who truly care about our region’s survival, these actions are deeply disturbing.
- Breaching our dams is simply not an option, and endless cycles of litigation and continued studies only put our region at risk.

- In Central Washington, we are actively working toward a clean energy future, strengthening our nation's supply chain, feeding the world, and protecting our native wildlife – and the Columbia and Snake River dams are at the center of it all, serving as an example for the rest of the world.
- As I have said for years, dams and fish can – and do – coexist.
- I will continue to fight for our dams, and I call on these misguided groups to stop playing politics and pay attention to the science, which clearly states that we are making advancements in the right direction.
- I urge the Committee to reject any proposal to insert yet another duplicative study in this bill, which will only lend more uncertainty for our way of life in Central Washington and throughout the Pacific Northwest.

Thank you, and I yield back...