

# Lower Snake River dams stakeholder process

August 21, 2019

## Background

In the fall of 2018, the Governor's Southern Resident Killer Whale Task Force identified the need to further investigate the impacts of removing or breaching the lower Snake River dams (LSRD) as a way to provide more salmon for Southern Resident orcas to eat. The task force received hundreds of public comments about removing or breaching the dams. The task force did not have adequate time to fully consider all the issues raised by commenters so they recommended a separate engagement process.

In response to this recommendation, the Washington State Legislature provided funding to the governor's office in the 2019-21 operating budget:

*...to contract with a neutral third party to establish a process for local, state, tribal and federal leaders and stakeholders to address issues associated with the possible breaching or removal of the lower Snake River dams in order to recover the Chinook salmon populations that serve as a vital food source for Southern Resident orcas.*

At the same time, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the federal Bureau of Reclamation, and Bonneville Power Administration – as co-lead agencies – are preparing an environmental impact statement (EIS). The EIS was ordered by the U.S. District Court for Oregon and is being conducted in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act. The EIS will evaluate the operations, maintenance and configurations of the four lower Snake River dams as part of the review of 14 federal projects in the Columbia River System. The draft EIS is scheduled to be publicly available in February 2020 and a final EIS completed in June 2020. Washington state is not a co-lead of this process.

## Engagement Process

To conduct the engagement process approved by the Legislature, the Washington State Governor's Office has hired a contractor team of Ross Strategic, Kramer Consulting, White Bluffs Consulting and Anchor QEA. The team will provide neutral facilitation and evaluation services. They will convene and meet with local, state, tribal, and federal leaders, stakeholders and collect public comment. They will then submit a report detailing the potential positive and negative impacts (social, economic, environmental) and opportunities gained and lost from the potential breaching or removal of the LSRD, as well as from retaining the dams.

***Gov. Inslee supports this process to hear from diverse voices and collect the range of views in Washington State in regards to the LSRD. He plans to use this information to help craft his potential recommendations to the federal court-ordered EIS.***

## What the Process Will Accomplish

The engagement process and report will:

- Provide a Washington State-focused summary of the effects of both retaining and breaching or removing the LSRD.
- Allow stakeholders, tribes and citizens an opportunity to express their opinions in a structured, neutral, facilitated process.
- Help inform the state of Washington position on the federal court-ordered EIS on Columbia River System operations.

## What the Process Will Not Do

The engagement process and report will not:

- Recommend whether the LSRD should be removed or breached.
- Develop new or prioritize potential mitigation options, although it will reflect a range of stakeholder thoughts and existing information on this subject.
- Provide recommendations on the best way to address costs and benefits from removing or breaching or retaining the LSRD.
- Utilize a stakeholder board to review and approve the draft or final report.
- Provide a summary of the effects on retaining or breaching/removal of the LSRD in Oregon, Idaho or Montana.

## Process Details

The work of the consultant team will consist of the following components:

- ***Gather and summarize previous analysis related to LSRD retention, and removal or breaching:*** The consultant will review and summarize publicly available information sources related to LSRD retention, and removal or breaching. Those sources include documents and reports issued by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Bonneville Power Administration, conservation organizations, scientific publications, business organizations, tribal governments, fisheries, sport and commercial fishing organizations, and other groups.
- ***Engage with stakeholders, tribes, states, federal agencies, legislators and congressional delegation:*** The consultants will interview individual stakeholders and stakeholder groups, experts and governmental officials to identify the effects, concerns and issues with retaining, breaching or removal of LSRD. Given the extensive interest and impacts surrounding the dams, the consultant will not be able to interview all people with interest in the issues. The goal is that all interested parties have confidence their perspective is considered and represented, whether they were interviewed or not. The governor's office will lead engagement of impacted tribes including the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission (CRITFC), and Upper Columbia United

Tribes (UCUT) as well as engagement with the states of Oregon, Idaho and Montana. The governor's office will brief legislators, the state congressional delegation and federal agencies.

- **Produce report:** The consultant will complete a draft and final report summarizing publicly available information and the results of the stakeholder interviews, tribal and state consultation, and public comment.
- **Gather public input:** Following completion of the draft report, the consultant will host an open public workshop on each side of the state, most likely in Vancouver, Wash. and the Tri-Cities area. Pre-identified focus groups representing different interests will provide perspectives in the workshops to assist the public in considering and preparing their written input on the draft report. The general public will be able to attend the public workshops as well as submit written input on the draft report.

## Timeline

- **August – Mid-November 2019** – Contractor gathers publicly available information and interviews stakeholders. Governor's office conducts tribal consultation with consultant support. Governor's office consults with the states of Oregon, Idaho and Montana. Governor's office will also brief legislators, the state's congressional delegation and federal agencies.
- **Early December 2019** – Draft report available for public written comment.
- **Early December 2019** – Public workshops. Governor's office conducts tribal consultation as well as with the states of Oregon, Idaho and Montana.
- **Late December 2019** – Public input period ends.
- **Mid-February 2020** – Final report complete and submitted to the governor and legislature.

## Questions?

You can contact:

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