



## THE ECONOMICS OF LOWER SNAKE RIVER DAM REMOVAL:

The Northwest Can Have a Healthy Snake River, Wild Salmon, and a Strong Economy

Scientists agree that removing the lower four Snake River dams would be the surest way to restore self-sustaining, fishable wild salmon and steelhead populations to the lower Snake River and its tributaries. Yet many people worry that removing these dams would harm the Northwest's energy supply, grain farmers, and irrigators. The truth is, removing these outdated dams and updating existing energy and grain transportation systems could improve the efficiency and reliability of these systems, as well as save taxpayer and electric ratepayer money. And recovery of Snake River salmon and steelhead would bring in hundreds of millions of dollars in new annual income to recreational and commercial fishing economies in both the inland and coastal Northwest. Finally, a free-flowing lower Snake River has enormous potential – independent of the fishery – to enhance the region's recreation and tourism economies.

### REPLACING THE DAMS' BENEFITS:

- **ENERGY:** The energy from the lower Snake River dams is replaceable. A recent study by the RAND Corporation indicates that far from harming the regional economy, replacing the energy generated by the lower Snake River dams with energy efficiency measures and renewable energy sources could generate as many as 15,000 new jobs. Another recent study by the Tellus Institute shows that over 13,000 megawatts of new cost-effective, clean energy can be developed in the Northwest through investments in energy efficiency, wind power, and other renewable energy sources. That's more than *twice* the energy the region needs to replace the energy produced by the lower Snake River dams *and* meet its expected growth in demand by 2020. Removing the lower Snake River dams and replacing their limited energy (about 5% of the Northwest's total) with energy efficiency and renewable energy could be a first step toward building a more diversified, resilient, and environmentally friendly regional energy portfolio while bringing new jobs to the region.
- **GRAIN TRANSPORTATION:** Efficient, affordable grain transportation can continue without the lower Snake River dams. Before the lock and dam system was completed in the mid-1970s, trains and barges beginning at the Tri-Cities on the Columbia River moved grain to the Portland area for export. Recent analyses by Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway and BST Associates show that if the lower Snake River dams were removed, upgrades to the existing rail system would allow rail and Tri-Cities barges to serve farmers at rates competitive with existing rates. Based on these analyses and a new state-funded rail rehabilitation package in Washington, we estimate it could cost as little as \$17.2 million to improve the rail system to affordably and efficiently handle grain currently barged down the lower Snake River.
- **IRRIGATION:** Irrigation is provided by only one of the reservoirs behind the four lower Snake River dams. This irrigation, which goes to 13 farms, can continue after dam removal by extending water intake pipes to a free-flowing lower Snake River. In fact, removing the lower Snake River dams would ease pressure on irrigators, especially in southern Idaho. Absent dam removal, salmon survival and recovery would likely require that southern Idaho irrigators allow more water to reach the lower Snake River in order to help push salmon past lower Snake River dams more safely.

## **CAPITALIZING ON A RESTORED RIVER AND RESTORED SALMON AFTER DAM REMOVAL:**

- **SPORT FISHING:** In 2001, Idaho had its first recreational salmon fishery in years. Even this limited season netted \$90 million for the state's economy. More than half this income went to rural river communities. Removing the lower Snake River dams would help make an even more lucrative annual fishery a regular occurrence. Recovering Snake River and steelhead to 1950s levels – a goal attainable by restoring a free-flowing lower Snake River, but likely not attainable with the lower Snake dams in place – would net over \$544 million per year in recreational fishing-related income for the State of Idaho alone according to [Ben Johnson Associates, Inc.](#) Most of that income would go to rural river communities. Recreational fishing in the states of Washington and Oregon would also benefit substantially.
- **COMMERCIAL FISHING:** The Institute for Fisheries Resources estimates that restoration of Snake and Columbia river salmon runs could yield up to an additional \$500 million/year in revenue to the region and support up to an additional 25,000 family wage jobs. Biologists estimate that about 70% of the Columbia Basin's recoverable salmon habitat lies within the Snake River Basin.
- **RECREATION AND TOURISM (OTHER THAN FISHING):** Before the lower Snake River dams were built in the 1960s and 70s, the lower Snake River had 68 named rapids. Dam removal would allow new boating, canoeing, kayaking, and rafting opportunities along 140 miles of newly restored river. The opportunity to once again experience a free-flowing lower Snake River would draw tourists from around the nation and the world. A 2002 study by the Army Corps of Engineers estimates non-fishing recreational benefits of up to \$310.5 million per year.

## **LOWER SNAKE RIVER DAM REMOVAL WOULD SAVE TAXPAYER AND RATEPAYER MONEY**

- **CURRENT FEDERAL POLICIES ARE EXPENSIVE AND INEFFECTIVE:** The 2004 federal salmon plan, which was recently declared illegal by a federal court, didn't make sense. It was projected to cost \$6 billion over 10 years, but would likely have resulted in the further decline of already imperiled salmon and steelhead. Now that the 2004 plan must be rewritten, the Northwest and the nation have an opportunity to examine more effective and fiscally prudent ways to restore healthy, fishable runs of wild Snake and Columbia river salmon and steelhead.
- **A ONE-TIME EXPENDITURE ON DAM REMOVAL WILL SAVE MONEY IN THE LONG RUN:** The money that the federal government had planned to spend on the recently invalidated \$6 billion federal salmon plan could be better spent on removing the lower Snake dams, replacing their benefits, and spending the money left over (likely more than half of it) on other habitat restoration and hatchery reform actions. In the long run, such a plan would save billions in federal taxpayer dollars and protect and improve the economies of communities from Riggins, Idaho to Astoria, Oregon. And, unlike the non-dam removal plans on the table, it would do what a successful federal salmon plan is supposed to do: recover healthy, fishable salmon and steelhead runs.