

factsheet

November 2006

Myths and facts about the lower Snake River dams

FACT: There are 13 ESA-listed salmon and steelhead stocks in the Columbia Basin. Of those, only four migrate through the lower Snake River dams. A seven-year study peer reviewed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers determined that breaching the dams, by itself, would not recover these fish.

The remaining nine listed stocks are in the upper, middle and lower Columbia River and would not be affected by breaching the lower Snake River dams.

MYTH: The four lower Snake River dams are low value.

FACT: It costs about \$5 per megawatt-hour to produce power at the dams. The cost for power from a gas-fired power plant has averaged \$50 per megawatt-hour in recent months.

MYTH: The four lower Snake River dams are high cost.

FACT: The four lower Snake River dams cost about \$50 million per year to operate. The median cost to replace the hydropower they generate, at today's power prices, is at least \$350 to \$500 million (depending on power prices and assumptions about fish operations) – every year, forever.

MYTH: The energy from the lower Snake River dams could be replaced by conservation and renewables.

FACT: The region needs the combined benefits of hydro, conservation and new renewables – not one or

the other. Conservation is expected to meet half the region's load growth in the next 20 years, and BPA, utilities and states are developing all of that. Replacing the lost power from those dams would only hasten the time when the region will have to install fossil-fuel-fired plants and run existing ones harder.

FACT: Without the lower Snake River dams, the region would be able to get less wind power. There will be 1,700 megawatts of wind on BPA's system by the end of 2007. But wind doesn't blow all the time. It needs to be balanced with other generation. Hydropower is an effective means to do that because it is flexible – able to generate power quickly and then be ramped down if needed.

FACT: Replacing the power from the lower Snake River dams with a coal plant would add millions of tons of carbon dioxide to the air every year.

FACT: Hydropower is the ultimate renewable resource – low cost and clean.



MYTH: The lower Snake River dams provide less than 1 percent of the region's electricity.

FACT: The roughly 1,000 average-megawatts of energy produced by these dams (with court-ordered fish operations) is about the amount of energy that the city of Seattle uses. It represents about 13 percent of the energy produced by the federal hydro system.

The lower Snake River dams also provide 3,480 megawatts of capacity – about 16 percent of the total capacity in the region. Capacity is important to prevent blackouts during cold snaps and other times of peak demand. It is also critical to our ability to develop wind generation.

STRAIGHT TALK: Dam removal would have wide-ranging impacts on the region's economy and transmission system reliability. The region needs to pursue a balanced effort that preserves low-cost energy at the same time it protects and preserves its fish and wildlife resources.