Outlawing Collaboration, Stifling Innovation, and Undermining Local Communities


Several of HR 6247’s provisions would significantly impact efforts to restore imperiled salmon and steelhead throughout the Pacific Northwest, while jeopardizing the jobs that these invaluable fish support. The bill would also stand in the way of collaborative, community-driven efforts around the nation to address challenges associated with natural resource management, public safety, and economic development.

Here are just a few of the ways that HR 6247 harms salmon recovery, hurts jobs, and holds back the Pacific Northwest:

**Jeopardizes “spill” at the Columbia and Snake River dams – a salmon protection measure that significantly increases salmon survival.** When it comes to helping young salmon migrate through the Columbia-Snake River federal dams, the science is crystal clear: spilling water at the dams is the best and safest measure out there, and it’s proving to be far more successful at increasing overall salmon survival than anyone realized. In fact, a joint federal-state-Tribal scientific study concluded that spill could be the key to actually recovering some salmon runs. But HR 6247 would allow any federal agency to put a stop to spill, based solely on whether that agency believes spill could potentially harm endangered fish in any way. Even the mere documentation of minor spill-related impacts (such as monitoring information about total dissolved gas levels) could be enough for one agency to put the kibosh on spill – despite its proven success. Putting spill at risk this way – by giving any agency unchecked veto power over spill – jeopardizes the vital gains in salmon returns over the past 5-6 years, along with the thousands of jobs and millions of dollars these higher returns bring to the Pacific Northwest.

**Prohibits any federal money from being spent on removing, partially removing, or even studying the removal of any dam in the United States (public or private) that currently generates or at one time generated hydropower (without explicit approval from Congress).** HR 6247 would severely constrain federal agencies from performing some of their most basic functions, including providing information to American citizens about public resources. If agencies are essentially prohibited from even studying the effects of dam removal, they will be similarly stymied in their ability to make well-informed decisions about the very public resources they are charged with managing – decisions that must be based on the best science and economic data available. Without this important information, agencies may place people and property at risk (if a dam poses any kind of threat to communities due to structural concerns) and/or allow the ongoing degradation of an invaluable natural resource (such as imperiled salmon or other species). Either scenario is unacceptable and forces federal agencies to shirk their legal responsibilities. Also, generally speaking, any legislation that bans information is a bad idea. Furthermore, HR 6247 would make it virtually impossible for federal agencies to participate in any voluntary, collaboratively-developed river restoration effort or community-driven watershed protection initiative, which could in turn spell the end of such efforts in communities around the nation. Similarly, the bill could
prevent communities around the U.S. from taking appropriate and necessary steps to ensure public safety and safeguard public resources.

Prevents any federal money from being spent on dam removal mitigation or restoration measures (without explicit approval from Congress). Once a dam has been removed or authorized for removal, you’d think that even the most ardent foe of dam removal would at least want to ensure that the necessary post-removal mitigation work is completed – if only to protect public health and safety. Instead, HR 6247 is the legislative equivalent of punitive damages, whereby the only thing being punished is the American public. By prohibiting funding for mitigation or restoration activities, HR 6247 would harm public health, communities, and watersheds – not to mention salmon and the people who depend on them. It’s also fiscally reckless; by all but guaranteeing that a dam removal project will remain incomplete (restoration and mitigation is often the lion’s share of any dam removal), HR 6247 would prevent any return on investment in the initial project – while actively damaging public resources in the process. Any legislation that is intentionally designed to squander federal, local, and private funds while harming rivers, fish, and people simply doesn’t make sense. Further, federal support for restoration work is often a key component of community-driven, voluntary watershed projects; by prohibiting such support, HR 6247 is a misguided attempt to outlaw collaboration.

Requires that Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) define “foregone revenue” as a fish and wildlife compliance cost. Foregone revenue is not a cost: it is a hypothetical calculation of the money that BPA could have generated from excess power sales if it had been allowed to violate the law and send water meant for salmon recovery (ie, spill) through dam turbines instead. While BPA currently (and controversially) counts foregone revenue as a cost, HR 6247 would cement this deceptive accounting practice into law. Codifying foregone revenue as a cost assumes that BPA has an inherent right to water that is used to aid migrating salmon rather than generate power. However, BPA has no legal right to Columbia Basin water and therefore has no legal basis for tagging foregone revenue as a fish and wildlife “cost.” Distorting costs and then reporting those misleading numbers to BPA’s wholesale customers on their monthly power bills, as HR 6247 also requires, only serves to politicize BPA’s role in fish and wildlife protection while obscuring the facts and misleading the public.

Prevent any federal funding for important energy efficiency and renewable energy programs and initiatives proposed by the Department of Energy. The Secretary of Energy, Steven Chu, issued a memo in March 2012 to the nation’s Power Marketing Administrations that lays out cost-effective solutions that will expand clean energy, increase reliability and keep electricity rates down. The increased amount of renewable energy and conservation will in turn give the PMAs (including Bonneville Power Administration) more flexibility to protect salmon while continuing to generate inexpensive hydropower and provide a more stable regional energy economy as well as more jobs for both the clean energy and fishing sectors. However, HR 6247 would essentially deep-six Secretary Chu’s memo, or at least unnecessarily delay its implementation for years. Salmon wouldn’t be the only thing to suffer as a result; one of the primary objectives of the Chu memo is to stimulate job creation in the clean energy economy – but by turning the nation’s energy development clock back to approximately 1950, HR 6247 would stand squarely in the path of these clean energy jobs and the economic activity they’d bring to the Northwest and beyond.