April 13, 2020

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Dear Regional Executives:

Please find enclosed the State of Washington’s comments on the Columbia River System Operations Draft Environmental Impact Statement (CRSO DEIS). The management of the Columbia and Snake rivers is vital to the economy, environment, and culture of Washington and the Pacific Northwest. As noted in my recent letter requesting an extension to the public comment period on this DEIS, it is unconscionable, in the midst of the COVID-19 emergency, to hold to the original 45-day public comment period. Even if there had been no emergency, this truncated comment period would have been insufficient to provide for adequate public review and comment of such a voluminous and complex document.

I ask that the issues identified in the attached comments from Washington State be addressed by the action agencies, as we build on the record of long-term collaboration on the operation of the Columbia and Snake rivers. Washington approaches management of the Columbia and Snake rivers with the following goals and principles in mind:

- Protecting and restoring abundant, harvestable salmon and steelhead and other native fish species, including contributing to a reliable source of prey for southern resident orcas;
Honoring tribal rights, including a future for salmon that supports tribes’ cultural, spiritual, and economic needs;

- Providing for a clean, affordable, and reliable energy system that meets our clean energy and climate goals;
- Ensuring affordable and reliable transportation alternatives for wheat farmers in the Palouse and Tri-Cities areas; and
- Ensuring reliable irrigation supplies for eastern Washington farms.

Based on these principles, I support continuing with flexible spill in the near-term as a starting point for further improvement, in concert with the full suite of fish mitigation measures referenced in the DEIS and the Northwest Power and Conservation Council’s Fish and Wildlife Plan. While flexible spill should be viewed as an incremental but significant step toward modernizing management of the Columbia system for improved fish survival and enhanced energy system flexibility, it is unlikely to be enough to restore salmon and steelhead to the levels needed to meet the above principles.

Because salmon need more than what is proposed in the DEIS, I am heartened by recent calls for, and steps toward, a regional collaboration about how to do more for salmon in a manner consistent with the energy, transportation, and irrigation needs of Washington and the Pacific Northwest. Washington stands ready to engage in these discussions, and I support collaboration among those most affected by river management decisions on how to prepare to implement stronger salmon recovery measures. Additional spill over the lower Snake and Columbia river dams and breaching the lower Snake River dams should remain among the measures under consideration. I reserve the right to provide more specific recommendations on this issue at the appropriate time, when we are no longer in the middle of an active public health emergency.

Thank you again for considering the enclosed comments.

Very truly yours,

Jay Inslee
Governor

Enclosures