

Governor's Lower Snake River Dams Engagement Process

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 interested parties and collect public comment. The Governor's office will be the lead in consulting with tribes, federal and state governments. The consultant team will provide a draft and final 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 regard to the LSRD. He plans to use this information to help craft his 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.
- Not develop new or prioritize potential mitigation options, although it will reflect a range of stakeholder thoughts and existing information on this subject.
- Not provide recommendations on the best way to address costs and benefits from removing or breaching or retaining the LSRD.
- Not utilize a stakeholder board to review and approve the draft or final report.
- Not provide a summary of the effects on retaining or breaching/removal of the LSRD in Oregon, Idaho or Montana.

Process Details and Timeline

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 (Summer -Fall 2019):** 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 (Fall 2019):** 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 (Draft Report Dec. 20, 2019 and Final March 2020):** 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 three public workshops on January 7, 9, and 13. Details are below.

Public Workshops

Purpose: to inform the interested public on the content of the draft report and provide an understanding of the different perspectives. The workshops are an opportunity to learn about the report in preparation of providing written comments by 5:00 pm on Friday, January 24, 2020.

Format: Presentation of the draft report findings followed by a panel discussion representing different interests. **Oral public comment will not be accepted during the workshops**, but audience members can submit written questions that can be asked of the consultants and panel, provided time is available. Written comments on the draft report will be accepted through 5:00 PM on January 24, 2020 through the project website: <http://lsrdstakeholderprocess.org/>.

Time: Doors open at 6:00 pm, program starts at 6:30 pm, and ends at 8:30 pm, followed by 30 minutes or more of informal conversations.

January 7th from 6:00pm – 9:00 pm: Clarkston
Quality Inn & Suites and Quay Convention Center
700 Port Drive, Clarkston, WA 99403

January 9th from 6:00pm – 9:00 pm: Vancouver
Washington State University Vancouver – Dengerink Administration Building (VDEN)
14204 NE Salmon Creek Ave, Vancouver, WA 98686-9600

January 13th from 6:00pm – 9:00 pm: Tri Cities
Red Lion Hotel & Conference Center
2525 North 20th Avenue, Pasco, WA 99301

Online Engagement Process

Input to the process can also be provided by completing a questionnaire <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/lsrdsurvey>. Responses to the online questionnaire will be accepted through 5:00 pm on January 24, 2020, the end of the public comment period for the draft report.

Questions? Contact Us

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