



P.O. Box 300  
Grangeville, Idaho 83530  
Phone: 208-983-1610  
Toll free: 877-212-0424  
Fax: 208-983-1432  
Email: iclp@iclp.coop  
Website: www.iclp.coop

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## **Fighting for the Survival of Northwest Dams**

In February, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Bureau of Reclamation and Bonneville Power Administration released the Columbia River System Operations draft environmental impact statement and opened a 45-day public review and comment period. The draft discussed many topics, including operations, maintenance and configuration of the 14 federal dam and reservoir projects that comprise the Columbia River System. The draft also studied five alternatives ranging from “no action” to removing dams.

While the removal study was the most controversial, the DEIS found that while salmon might do better without the dams in place, the benefit to fish was uncertain, while societal costs would be extreme. The study found breaching the lower Snake River dams would double the risk of a regionwide blackout and increase pollution significantly. Other dam removal effects include raising power costs to each of you by up to 25% and reducing the ability to add new wind and solar power to the grid in the future. The study also determined the impact to shipping, irrigation, loss of jobs and other benefits of the dams to be extreme.

After looking at all alternatives, the agencies’ recommendations focused on a preferred alternative that keeps the dams, but increases “spill”—that is water going over dams instead of through turbines—across the eight dams on the lower Columbia and Snake rivers. The idea is to help more juvenile migrating salmon avoid turbines. However, there is reputable science that indicates the nitrogen trapped in the water by spill may kill more fish than it helps. This preferred alternative likely will increase wholesale power rates by 3% and equate to roughly a 1.5% rate increase for our members. We will see where this ends up.

In April, ICL&P submitted comments on the Columbia River System Operations DEIS. These comments were due by April 13. The final EIS will be issued by June 30. Since we buy our power from BPA, this will affect all of our members and most of the Northwest.

While I believe everyone is concerned about the salmon in the rivers and wants to make sure they remain here for our children and grandchildren, we must look further because other rivers up and down the coast see the same declines in salmon. These other rivers don’t have dams, but show the same decline in salmon. When you take that into account, the ocean becomes more apparent as a larger problem than the dams. More than 80% of a salmon’s life is spent in the ocean.

While the dams are not perfect, they do have a 96% survival rate for fish making it through dams, whether they go through the turbine, bypass, spillway or surface weir. This is the direct result of nearly \$18 billion spent since 1980 to improve fish passage routes. To get to this \$18 billion, on average, about \$15 of your monthly bill goes to fish and wildlife projects in the Northwest. While we cannot control this amount—which is applied to our power bill—we do our best to ensure our voice is heard on issues that will affect our members.

Hydropower provides a clean energy resource, and it benefits many people and industries all around us. Decisions being made today will affect us for many years to come.

Thanks for listening,

**Max Beach**  
**General Manager**