NRECA
America's Electric Cooperatives

Jim Matheson

June 26, 2024

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair
Committee on Appropriations
S-128 The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Chuck Fleischmann
Chair
Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development
House Committee on Appropriations
2362-B Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable John Kennedy
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development
142 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Marcy Kaptur
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development
1036 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chair Murray, Chairman Fleischmann, Ranking Member Kennedy, and Ranking Member Kaptur,

America's electric cooperatives rely on a diverse suite of energy resources to keep the lights on across the nation. In the Pacific Northwest, carbon-free hydropower is the backbone of reliability for electric cooperatives and the region's electric grid.

NRECA strongly opposes recent actions by the Biden Administration that accelerate efforts to breach the Lower Snake River Dams (LSRD). These dams are critical to providing affordable and reliable electricity to the Northwestern United States. As you consider fiscal year 2025 appropriations bills, we urge you to prohibit any implementation of the Columbia River Basin Initiative (CBRI) which gravely jeopardizes the hydropower capabilities of the LSRD.

The Presidential Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) establishing the CBRI, signed in December, was an inflection point in the decades-long debate over the multipurpose hydropower resources that are the backbone of the Northwest economy. This MOU mentions dam breaching 24 times and replacement power 27 times - the first time any Administration has embraced breaching federal dams and detailed a pathway to make it happen without Congressional authorization.

Our concerns were amplified last week when the Administration took steps to implement the MOU by publishing a report from the Department of Interior and establishing a task force to implement its findings. Alarmingly, the task force lacks any representation from the region's energy stakeholders and the report recommends overhauling the government's approach to NEPA reviews in the region. It also telegraphs a desire to reopen the 2020 Columbia River System Operations NEPA Record of Decision, which rejected dam breaching outright.

Additionally, the report signals a desire to exceed the statutory boundaries of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and other environmental laws by recommending that "the government should aim for *more than compliance*" with these statutes. This unlawful interpretation of ESA could be leveraged by proponents of

dam breaching to influence legal outcomes pertaining to river operations and further undermine hydropower resources.

Frustratingly, and ironically, every step towards breaching the dams weakens the Administration's stated greenhouse gas reduction goals by jeopardizing hydropower, an always-available, emissions-free source of electric generation critical to grid stability. And, as demand for electricity skyrockets across the nation, we need more generating resources – not fewer.

To protect the reliability of the Western electric grid, the stability of our domestic food and mineral supplies, and our nation's energy security, it is imperative that we act now to stop any implementation of this ill-conceived plan to breach the Lower Snake River Dams.

Thank you for your consideration, and I look forward to working with you to protect these vital assets.



Jim Matheson