



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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U.S. ARMY CORPS MUST COOL WATER HEATED BY COLUMBIA AND SNAKE RIVER DAMS FOR SALMON, COURT TO FIND

Olympia, WA (June 29, 2021)—The Washington Pollution Control Hearings Board (PCHB) [announced](#) it will uphold the Washington Dept. of Ecology’s new restrictions on hot water pollution from Columbia and Lower Snake River dams and reservoirs operated by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Army Corps).

“The current heat wave is proof that we must take hot water in the Snake and Columbia rivers seriously,” explained Brett VandenHeuvel, executive director of Columbia Riverkeeper. “Today’s announcement is a significant step towards holding the Army Corps accountable for the heat pollution caused by its dams and reservoirs. We also need Northwest elected leaders to develop inclusive solutions to protect salmon and reinvest in river communities.”

The federal government’s own studies show that large, shallow reservoirs created by the Columbia and Lower Snake dams slow the rivers’ natural flow and soak up the sun’s energy, making the water too hot for endangered salmon and steelhead. In recent years, dwindling fish populations have forced the closure of important tribal and non-tribal fisheries. And scientists warn that several Columbia and Snake River salmon populations, and the Southern Resident orcas that depend on them, may very soon go extinct. In response, Washington—for the first time ever—placed legal limits on the dams’ hot water pollution to help ensure that the rivers will meet water quality standards and remain cool enough for salmon to survive and recover. Today’s announcement affirms Washington’s authority to protect salmon from harmful, even deadly, hot water caused by the Army Corps’ dams.

“The Army Corps must manage the dams to reduce water temperatures,” warned Giulia Good Stefani, senior attorney at NRDC. “Declining Columbia and Snake Basin salmon is a social justice, wildlife, and economic crisis. If the federal government doesn’t change dam operations to

reduce hot water, the fish and the complex web of life and communities in the region that depend on salmon are all cooked. During a hot summer like this one, the water behind the dams heats up like a dog bowl left in the sun. And that can kill lots of salmon.”

“Our industry is still reeling from the legacy of the 2015 drought, when hot water in the Columbia basin killed hundreds of thousands of adult salmon,” said Liz Hamilton, executive director of NSIA. “This announcement is good news for our fish, but we still need our region’s elected leaders to support inclusive solutions and swift action for salmon recovery. Thousands of jobs in the Northwest and beyond depend on our success.”

The Northwest Sportfishing Industry Association (NSIA), NRDC (Natural Resources Defense Council), and Columbia Riverkeeper, represented by Earthjustice, intervened in the case to support the State of Washington’s right to protect salmon from lethal river temperatures caused by the dams.

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BACKGROUND

Historic Action to Protect Salmon and Water Quality:

- On May 7, 2020, the Washington Dept. of Ecology exercised the state’s authority under Clean Water Act Section 401 to help ensure that the Columbia Basin’s federal dam operators address rising water temperatures to protect salmon. Washington issued eight separate 401 certifications, one for each dam, including, for example, [The Dalles Dam 401 certification document](#).
- Additionally, for the four Lower Columbia River dams—Bonneville, The Dalles, John Day, and McNary—the [State of Oregon issued an “objection letter”](#) based on its Clean Water Act authority as a downstream state. In the letter, the Oregon Dept. of Environmental Quality: (1) determined that discharges from the dams violate state water quality standards, including temperature and total dissolved oxygen, and (2) requested a public hearing.
- EPA issued a [temperature pollution budget](#), known as a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL), for the Columbia and Lower Snake rivers. The PCHB’s decision will require the Army Corps’ dams and reservoirs to comply with the TMDL’s limits on temperature pollution.

RESOURCES

- [Columbia Riverkeeper et al.’s Motions for Summary Judgment](#)
- [PCHB’s Notice of Pending Decision on Summary Judgment](#)

- [Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians Resolution 2020-25 Supporting Dept. of Ecology's Temperature Limits on Federal Dams to Protect Salmon](#)
- [Dept. of Ecology's 401 Certification for The Dalles Dam](#)
- [Public Comments on Ecology Section 401 Certifications](#)
- [Columbia Riverkeeper's FAQ about Clean Water Act Section 401 Certification](#)