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Snake River: Conservation & Fishing Groups Agree to Pause Litigation, Discuss Long-Term, Comprehensive Solution to Aid Struggling Salmon

Federal agencies agree to stop-gap measures for dam operations in 2022

Portland, OR – Earthjustice, on behalf of a coalition of fishing and conservation groups, today joined with Biden administration agencies, the State of Oregon and the Nez Perce Tribe [to seek a pause](#) until next summer in litigation challenging the latest federal plan for hydropower operations on the Snake and Columbia Rivers. The request for a stay includes an agreement for specific dam operations in 2022. If the Court grants the stay, these parties have committed to use the time to work together to develop and implement a comprehensive, long-term solution that could resolve the long-running litigation over dam operations in *National Wildlife Federation v. National Marine Fisheries Service*.

The [request submitted to the Court](#) states that it “provide[s] an interim compromise while the Parties work together to develop and begin implementing a long-term comprehensive solution.”

“Columbia River salmon have been essential to this treasured river basin for millennia. Now, the salmon and the people, wildlife, and ecosystems that rely upon them are running out of time. This pause in our decades-running litigation offers the federal government, states, Tribes, and conservation advocates an opportunity to come together and finally find common-ground and enact a comprehensive solution to restore salmon,” said **Collin O’Mara, president and CEO of the National Wildlife Federation**. “Congressman Mike Simpson has started an important, bipartisan conversation in the region about the future of Northwest salmon and the lower Snake River dams. We appreciate the commitment of the federal government, State of Oregon, Nez Perce Tribe, and the conservation community to work together to comprehensively resolve this long-standing controversy. We look forward to working with these parties, Tribes and other interests to achieve a successful outcome.”

“We must act very quickly because our salmon are headed toward extinction. Snake River steelhead returns this year were the lowest ever recorded and other stocks are not doing much better,” said **Liz Hamilton, Executive Director Northwest Sportfishing Industry Association**. “We urgently need a real, comprehensive solution that works for all interests and believe these discussions can deliver that result for salmon, and salmon-dependent communities and others. NSIA is committed to making every effort in the coming months to reach that outcome but is ready to go back to court if we have to.”

“Our region is entering a period of unique opportunity to forge a comprehensive solution that works for all, restores the Snake River and its salmon and honors the rights of tribes. This pause in litigation has engaged the leadership of the Biden administration at a time when key Northwest leaders are also putting forward plans like Rep. Simpson’s and initiatives like Senator Murray’s and Governor Inslee’s to take a new path and develop a durable solution,” said **Bill Arthur, the Sierra Club’s Snake River Campaign Director**.

“This one-year agreement will provide additional protections for endangered salmon and steelhead in 2022, but the fishing and conservation groups know that with the current configuration of the system, this will not be enough for long-term revitalization of the fish,” said **Todd True, Earthjustice attorney**. “We’ve said all along that what we need to do is restore the lower Snake River, including breaching the four federal dams there, and make other appropriate investments to replace the power and other economic benefits they provide. That’s the kind of solution we’re seeking.”

The Agreement filed with the Court today not only creates an opportunity to develop and implement a comprehensive solution, it also increases, for 2022, the amount of water shifted away from dam turbines starting next spring to help endangered salmon populations navigate the dams in the Columbia and Snake River basins. Increasing “spill,” as it is called, helps juvenile fish avoid the turbines and pass each dam more quickly along their perilous river migration to reach the ocean where they mature. The Agreement also includes other measures to address the harmful effects of dam operations. The conservation and fishing groups recognize, however, that these are emergency, stop-gap measures to afford these species incremental survival benefits. They are not alone enough to prevent the decline of these fish toward extinction.

In this case, Earthjustice represents American Rivers, Idaho Rivers United, Institute for Fisheries Resources, NW Energy Coalition, Northwest Sportfishing Industry Association, Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen’s Associations, Sierra Club, National Wildlife Federation, Columbia Riverkeeper, Idaho Conservation League and Fly Fishers International as plaintiffs. The State of Oregon is also a plaintiff in the case, and the Nez Perce Tribe is an amicus party aligned with Oregon and the fishing and conservation groups.

The federal agencies involved are U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Bureau of Reclamation, Bonneville Power Administration, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the National Marine Fisheries Service.