

August 28, 2025

The Honorable Bruce Westerman
Chairman
House Committee on Natural Resources
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C., 20515

The Honorable Jared Huffman
Ranking Member
House Committee on Natural Resources
1332 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C., 20515

The Honorable Harriet Hageman
Chair
House Committee on Natural Resources
Water, Wildlife, and Fisheries Subcommittee
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C., 20515

The Honorable Val Hoyle
Ranking Member
House Committee on Natural Resources
Water, Wildlife, and Fisheries Subcommittee
1332 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C., 20515

Dear Chairman Westerman and Ranking Member Huffman:

RE: Opposition to H.R. 2073

Dear Chairman Westerman, Ranking Member Huffman, Chair Hageman, and Ranking Member Hoyle:

The undersigned 65 businesses and organizations write on behalf of our millions of members and supporters in strong opposition to H.R. 2073, the “Defending our Dams Act.” This legislation would not address real challenges facing the Northwest, including struggling wild salmon and orca populations, rising energy rates, and outdated infrastructure. Instead, it would codify a head-in-the-sand approach to these interconnected challenges and double down on President Trump’s unilateral withdrawal from the Resilient Columbia Basin Agreement that sought to comprehensively address them. We urge the subcommittee to strongly oppose this legislation.

The wild salmon and steelhead of the Columbia River Basin are both a national treasure and an icon of the Northwest. These fish are critically important to Tribal nations throughout the Basin, including the four Lower Columbia River Treaty Tribes who reserved their right to fish in their treaties with the U.S. in 1855; to the recreational and commercial fishing industries, whose livelihoods depend on continued salmon runs; to the Southern Resident orcas and other species that feed on or are connected to salmon; and to all of us who cherish these emblematic species. But just a small fraction of the Columbia’s once plentiful wild salmon now return to spawn each year, in large part due to habitat loss, heightened river temperatures, increased predation, and other direct consequences of the hydrosystem. Thirteen Columbia and Snake River salmon and steelhead stocks are currently listed under the Endangered Species Act, many populations are already extirpated or nearing extinction, and none are near their historical abundance. At the same time, challenges such as extreme weather events and load growth are putting increasing pressure on the electrical grid and demonstrating the need for quickly and responsibly deploying new renewable energy resources. Solving interconnected challenges such as these requires a willingness to ask hard questions and work collaboratively, rather than simply continuing a failed status quo.

Unfortunately, H.R. 2073 would significantly undermine efforts to address these issues. If passed into law, this legislation would permanently prohibit the use of any federal funds to study replacing any of the services provided by the lower Snake River dams, regardless of the benefits of those replacement projects, and could hamstring any number of projects that one might argue may “lead to” altering the dams. It would also prevent the federal government from even studying breach of the lower Snake River dams, despite federal and independent scientists repeatedly determining that is a required centerpiece

action to restore salmon runs. In other words, H.R. 2073 would force federal agencies to ignore reality and forever eschew exactly the kind of research and planning that the region needs if it is to recover salmon, deploy clean energy, and modernize infrastructure.

Additionally, the legislation could have unintended consequences by potentially preventing necessary modifications to the Lower Snake River dams by prohibiting any “functional alteration of” the dams. This undefined term could give rise to arguments that even replacing (or considering whether to replace) a spillway gate, temporarily shutting down the navigational locks to make repairs, or altering operations to account for shifting river conditions under climate change would be prohibited by this bill. It also confuses the fundamentally distinct roles played by the agency that manages the dams (the Army Corps of Engineers) and the agency that markets the power they generate (the Bonneville Power Administration) by requiring the explicit approval of both agencies before any changes are made to dam operations, possibly upsetting the delicate balance that was adopted as part of the Northwest Power Act.

Rather than pursuing H.R. 2073, Congress should focus on addressing real needs created by the administration’s mass firings of staff at agencies that support salmon recovery and freezing of funds supporting critical infrastructure projects. Congress should also help advance the only comprehensive plan to address salmon, energy, and infrastructure challenges: the Columbia Basin Restoration Initiative developed by the Six Sovereigns. With the administration’s recent withdrawal from the agreement implementing that plan, it is more important than ever that Congress advance win-win solutions that address the needs of Tribes, states, and stakeholders, rather than harmful legislation such as H.R. 2073.

Sincerely,

American Rivers
American Whitewater
Association of Northwest Steelheaders
Blue Mountains Biodiversity Project
bluefish.org
Center for Biological Diversity
Central/Eastern Oregon Chapter of the Great Old Broads for Wilderness
Columbia Riverkeeper
Consolidated Oregon Indivisible Network (COIN)
Defenders of Wildlife
Duna Fisheries, LLC
EcoFlight
Endangered Species Coalition
F/V Arminta
Fly Fishers International
Friends of the Clearwater
Friends of the San Juans
Hispanic Access Foundation
Idaho Conservation League
Idaho Rivers United
Indivisible Bellingham
Indivisible Sequim
Indivisible Vashon
Intercommunity Peace & Justice Center
JUJustice Wasiington
Kettle Range Conservation Group
League of Conservation Voters

Mckenzie River Guides Association
Nimiipuu Protecting the Environment
Northeast Oregon Ecosystems
Northwest Sportfishing Industry Association
Northwest Watershed Institute
NW Energy Coalition
Oceana
Olympia Indivisible
Oregon League of Conservation Voters
Oregon Shores
Oregon Wild
Pacific Rivers
Puget Soundkeeper Alliance
Rivers Without Borders
Save Our wild Salmon Coalition
Sierra Club
Snake River Savers
Snake River Waterkeeper
Snohomish County Indivisible
Sound Action
Spokane Riverkeeper
Students for Climate Action Bellingham
The OP Resists
The Sawtooth Society
Twin Harbors Waterkeeper
Vashon Climate Action Group
Washington Conservation Action
Washington Wild
WaterWatch of Oregon
Western Watersheds Project
Western Wildlife Conservancy
Whale and Dolphin Conservation, North America
Wild Steelhead Coalition
WildEarth Guardians
Wildlife for All
Willamette Riverkeeper
Youth Salmon Protectors
350Wenatchee.org