

Rep. Simpson’s “Concept” to Breach the Lower Snake River Dams Would Undermine the Very Wild Salmon and Steelhead it Aims to Protect and Recover

Rep. Mike Simpson (R-ID) has proposed a legislative concept to breach the four Lower Snake River dams in exchange for, among other things, suspending the Clean Water Act, Endangered Species Act, National Environmental Policy Act, and FERC licensing for dams and agriculture across the vast Columbia River basin for 25–35 years.

Although we strongly support removal of the Lower Snake River dams, the deal proposed in the Simpson Concept is an unacceptable attack on the nation’s most important environmental laws for an entire generation across the vast expanse of the Columbia River Basin. **As proposed, the Simpson Concept would sacrifice rivers in Oregon, Washington, and Idaho—like the Willamette, Deschutes, Clearwater, and Spokane—by:**

- Eliminating for 35 years the nation’s key environmental laws that protect salmon, water quality, and habitat from 78 dams across the Columbia River basin.
- Eliminating for 50 years the “public interest” review in FERC licensing of private dams that ensures protections of fish, wildlife, recreation, water quality, and more.
- Increasing environmental injustice across the basin by increased contamination of fish and drinking water; decreased fish populations; degraded conditions for workers and their families; increased harmful agriculture; and loss of access to courts for justice—all of which will disproportionately harm some communities more than others.
- Turning over control of water quality to state Departments of Agriculture, agencies that have a demonstrated hostility to environmental and agricultural worker protections.
- Eliminating for 25 years protections for water quality, fish, wildlife, aquifers, and wetlands from agricultural activities and subject threatened and endangered species to harm from pesticide, nutrient, and temperature pollution.
- Failing to meaningfully address salmon-killing temperatures in the Mainstem Columbia River by eliminating current legal requirements to address these lethal temperatures.
- Spending 34 billion dollars to “mitigate” dam breaching impacts to agriculture, transportation, and power generation without any performance requirements to ensure the public and salmon benefit from the expenditure of this vast investment.
- Encouraging massive factory farms that contribute to climate change, pollute air and water, and consume vast amounts of water.

We stand ready to work with those who recognize the need to remove the lower four Snake River dams and address related impacts of breaching these dams. However, we cannot support a proposal that sacrifices environmental laws, sacrifices the human health and species protections provided by those laws, spends billions without accountability, and will likely accelerate the extinction of wild salmon and steelhead runs and other species across the Columbia Basin.

Blue Mountains Biodiversity Partnership, Cascadia Wildlands, Center for Biological Diversity, Center for Food Safety, Deschutes River Alliance, Friends of the Earth, Food & Water Watch, Native Fish Society, Northwest Center for Alternatives to Pesticides, Northwest Environmental Advocates, Nuclear Information and Resource Service, Oregon Wild, Spokane Riverkeeper, The Conservation Angler, WaterWatch of Oregon, Wild Fish Conservancy, Willamette Riverkeeper, WildEarth Guardians 4/9/2021