



# The Enterprise

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## **WDOE details tradeoffs if Condit Dam removed**

Story by: Jesse Burkhardt

Despite significant short-term harmful impacts if Condit Dam is removed and Northwestern Lake is drained, according to the Washington Department of Ecology (WDOE), the long-term benefits could outweigh those impacts.

That appears to be the gist of a massive "Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement" (FEIS) released by the WDOE on March 23, 2007. The document, which is several hundred pages in length, was produced "to address the proposals by PacifiCorp to remove the Condit Hydroelectric Project on the White Salmon River ... to identify and evaluate a range of reasonable alternatives to the proposal, identify probable significant impacts associated with the proposal and its alternatives, and address mitigation measures to be imposed by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission," read an opening statement from Derek Sandison, central regional director for the WDOE.

PacifiCorp, a Portland utility, has proposed to remove the dam, and has set a target date of October 2008 to do so. The 125-foot high dam, at river mile 3.3 on the White Salmon River, was built in 1913.

Proponents of dam removal saw the issuance of the FEIS as more evidence that taking the dam out will not create any significant long-term problems.

"DOE has completed a really comprehensive document that details how the benefits significantly outweigh the drawbacks of removal, said Brett Swift, Northwest deputy director of American Rivers, a national conservation organization dedicated to protecting and restoring healthy natural rivers.

Swift added that the document reinforces the perspective of American River on the benefits of dam removal.

"It contains a lot of information we've been putting forward for a while regarding benefits to habitat restoration and water quality," Swift explained. "All of the issues DOE analyzed demonstrate the benefits to removal. It does document the short-term impacts. There are undoubtedly impacts, but the impacts are pretty minimal."

"Rivers are remarkably resilient," explained Amy Kober, Northwest communications director for American Rivers. "More than 700 dams have been removed on rivers across the country, with significant benefits to fish and wildlife, clean water, and recreation. The long-term benefits of removing Condit Dam far outweigh any short-term impacts."

Those who want to see the dam remain in place and generating power see the "drawbacks to benefits" scenario in a different light, however.

Husum resident Jim Rhoads is one who disagrees with the claim that the short-term costs are minimal when compared with supposed long-term benefits.

"DOE and the river advocates say the short-term cost is worth the long-range benefit," Rhoads said. "The alleged long-term benefits are far less than they suggest, and the short-term cost is far more than alleged."

In Chapter 1.6.1, the FEIS documents "Beneficial effects of dam removal" as follows: "The most notable beneficial effects would accrue to the fish and aquatic organisms that would use the free-flowing stream," it reads. "Potentially, 32 miles of new steelhead habitat and 15 miles of new salmon habitat may be accessed by anadromous salmonids after dam removal, increasing ... salmonids in the White Salmon River and increasing the availability of salmon and steelhead angling opportunities in the White Salmon River basin ... additional stream habitat for resident fish will be created in the lake bed of the former reservoir. Additionally, the small increase in water temperature below Condit Dam from the discharge of warmed reservoir surface water will be eliminated, improving the quality of thermal refuge, and the recruitment of gravel and large woody debris from sources above the dam site will be re-established. Foraging, wintering, and refuge habitat -- and possibly spawning habitat -- will be created for Columbia River bull trout ... there will be other changes that will benefit some users and adversely affect others. For example, while there would no longer be reservoir-based recreation opportunities, there would be river based recreation opportunities, such as kayaking and stream fishing."

The serious negative impacts were also addressed at length. Chapter 1.6.3 is labeled "significant unavoidable adverse impacts," and there are a dozen subheadings within that category.

For example, under the heading "aquatic resources" is the following: "All fish and aquatic micro-invertebrates within the White Salmon River channel downstream of the dam will likely be killed or displaced by the load of suspended solids that will occur during dam breaching ... the effect on populations ... will likely take several years to fully re-establish."

Other key impacts include:

Water resources: "Elevated turbidity levels are expected in the Bonneville pool, where the waters of the Columbia River and the White Salmon River mix. Clay particles will likely remain suspended in the Columbia River, thus temporarily increasing turbidity, all the way to the mouth of the Columbia River."

Geology, soils and sediments: "Movement of sediments through the channel and floodplain redevelopment and formation are unavoidable adverse impacts."

Aesthetics and scenic resources: "Short-term significant unavoidable adverse impacts to views along the reservoir would occur until

revegetation occurs and the free flowing river is established. One overall significant long term change to aesthetics and scenic resources would remain and be unavoidable: That would be the change from a lake view to a view of a stream corridor. However, depending on one's perception, this may or may not be a significant impact."

Rhoads pointed out that he believed dam removal proponents were willing to see portions of the river sacrificed in exchange for a hoped-for improvement to other parts of the river.

"The mouth of the White Salmon river is now a world-class fishery," Rhoads explained. "If the dam is removed, it would be a mud flat down there. You could take the fishing there and just eliminate it until that area is dredged. They allege umpteen more miles of fish habitat, but that's hogwash. Realistically, there would be 10 or 11 miles of restored habitat -- but you'd have to subtract the 3.3 miles below the dam from that."