

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 16, 2023

The Honorable Jennifer M. Granholm  
Secretary, U.S. Department of Energy  
1000 Independence Ave, SW  
Washington, DC 20585

Dear Secretary Granholm,

We write, as members representing constituents from the Northwest United States, urging the Department of Energy to be an advocate for the continued operation of the entire Federal Columbia River Power System, in particular the hydroelectric dams on the lower Snake River, consistent with the 2020 Columbia River System Operations Record of Decision. Hydropower is a reliable and carbon-free resource that provides power to millions of Americans. Despite this, certain voices in the Biden Administration continue to advocate for breaching dams and reducing the System's benefits, which would have far-reaching and devastating consequences.

We were encouraged by your recent testimony before the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee on April 20, 2023, in which you said that you "completely agree (hydropower) is a renewable, cheap form of power that we should be expanding and not reducing." On average, the lower Snake River dams provide the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) with approximately 1,000 megawatts of power annually. With the capacity to generate over 3,000 megawatts of power on-demand, the lower Snake River dams are vital for meeting peak energy demands and supplying affordable power to millions of Americans. Notably, BPA credited the lower Snake River dams as responsible for keeping the lights on in part of its service territory during the July 2021 heatwave.

The United States is creating an energy crisis by turning away from reliable baseload and peaking power sources: the kind of generation required to fill in the gaps left by wind, solar, and batteries and to operate a safe and dependable electric grid. We need to maintain our existing sources of reliable energy, including hydropower. There is no similarly effective carbon-free alternative available or in place. As the Secretary of Energy, we expect your clear, unqualified support for all federal dams, especially those on the lower Snake River.

Energy affordability, as you know, is also a major issue. Roughly 25% of all Northwest residents meet the standard of "energy burdened," paying 6% or more of their gross monthly income toward energy expenses. The Bonneville Power Administration's 2021-commissioned study shows that, given commercially available technologies, replacing the generating capabilities of the lower Snake River dams would cost up to \$77 billion (net present value).

This cost would be passed on to BPA's public utility customers in the form of a 65% rate increase, representing a devastating blow to low-income and disadvantaged communities throughout the Northwest. Such an outcome threatens the Biden Administration's own decarbonization objectives. In 2021, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine warned the greatest threat to the fulfillment of decarbonization targets is the risk posed by leaving vulnerable communities behind. The organization rightly anticipated a major public backlash if prices get too high.

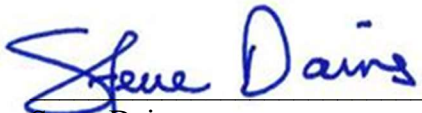
The lower Snake River dams are also vital to flood control, irrigation, agriculture, and navigation in the Northwest. Not only do the dams generate massive economic and recreational benefits for the region, through fish adaptations, the dams have also achieved 96 percent passage survival for juvenile yearling Chinook salmon and steelhead smolts.

Salmon recovery has and will continue to be a longstanding regional issue. However, the Department of Energy should and must have a vested interest in ensuring clean, affordable baseload energy like hydropower. An effective solution to the anadromous fish issues in the region will only come from a collaborative process that includes all stakeholders, not only those favorable to the Administration's position.


On May 9, Director of the DOE's Loan Programs Office, Jigar Shah, indicated the need for hydropower industry stakeholders and the DOE to collaborate on addressing challenges preventing increased investment and innovation in the industry. We commend this joint approach and urge you to employ the same outlook toward the Federal Columbia River Power System.

We look forward to cooperating with the Department in its effort to expand hydropower resources, and request that you provide clarification on how the lower Snake River dams will continue to fit into this goal. It is imperative that the Department of Energy stand firmly against appeals to breach the lower Snake River dams.

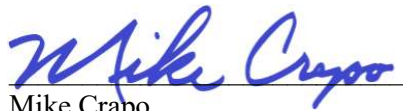
Sincerely,



Steve Daines  
United States Senator



James E. Risch  
United States Senator



Mike Crapo  
United States Senator