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January 29, 2024

The Honorable Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Chair
Committee on Energy & Commerce
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Frank Pallone
Ranking Member
Committee on Energy & Commerce
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jeff Duncan
Chair
Subcommittee on Energy, Climate &
Grid Security
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Diana Degette
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Energy, Climate & Grid
Security
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

RE: January 30, 2024, Committee Hearing on Snake River Dams

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for this opportunity to speak into the record concerning the importance of the hydroelectric dams on the Columbia and Snake Rivers in the Pacific Northwest (PNW). As a representative of agricultural retailers who supply farmers in the region, and also as a native of the PNW, I have personally witnessed the importance and value of the dams in the Columbia-Snake River system.

It's frankly unfathomable to me how anyone who claims to be interested in low-carbon renewable energy, reducing carbon emissions associated with transportation, efficient use of fuel, economic growth and competitiveness, food security or quality of life for residents can even entertain the extreme idea of breaching those dams. Countless reports and studies – the most recent by Washington Senator Patty Murray and Washington Governor Jay Inslee – have concluded that breaching the dams would inflict unacceptable harm on the region; yet this unfounded idea still apparently has legs.

Let me briefly unpack each of the attributes mentioned above:

- **Renewable energy:** The Biden Administration has put an enormous amount of effort and taxpayer dollars into transitioning the economy away from fossil fuels. One of the best sources of low-carbon renewable energy is hydropower, and it doesn't require any new investment because that work has already been done. Maintenance of the locks, dams and river channel is all that is required to keep generating this environmentally friendly low-cost power. Not only does this electricity power much of the PNW economy, but if the Administration's vision for converting motor vehicles to electricity is to come true, even more renewable power will be necessary to charge those vehicles. Reducing that production by breaching dams would be a monumental mistake.

- **Emissions from transportation and efficient use of fuel:** The barge transportation system enabled by the Columbia and Snake River dams provides a significant economic benefit in efficient freight and an environmental benefit in the form of reduced fuel consumption and road wear. Each barge on the river system replaces either 35 jumbo hopper rail cars or 134 trucks¹ to haul the same amount of product, whether that product is wheat moving downriver destined for world markets or fertilizer and fuel moving upriver to the inland northwest. Breaching the dams would shift that transportation load to a rail system that is already having difficulty providing reliable and timely service. Moving it to trucks would result in substantially more wear on highways – if drivers for those trucks could be found at all. Either shift would result in more fuel consumed to move a ton of commodity and more resulting greenhouse gas emissions. One gallon of diesel fuel can move a ton of commodity 647 miles by barge, but only 477 miles by train and 145 miles by truck².
- **Economic growth & competitiveness.** Inexpensive and renewable hydropower, efficient transportation and irrigation water are essential components of the PNW economy. Much of the inland northwest high-value crops like grapes, apples or potatoes depend on irrigation water from the river system. Efficient competitive transportation to world markets is a vital link to remain competitive in those markets. The United States needs to invest *more* in infrastructure to ensure our ongoing competitiveness, not let the system deteriorate through lack of investment and certainly not destroy it intentionally through breaching.
- **Food security.** Much of the nation’s agricultural bounty that is exported moves through the Columbia-Snake River System. In the 2019/20 and 2020/21 marketing years, more than 55% of all wheat exports from the United States moved through this system³. Corn and soybeans from the Midwest also move to export destinations through the Columbia-Snake system, and the presence of barge transportation in the system maintains competitive pressure on rail rates for those movements.
- **Quality of life.** Recreation is one of the significant benefits of the dams on the Columbia-Snake River system. Individual boating and fishing and commercial river cruises make a meaningful contribution to the economy which would not exist if the dams did not make the channel navigable.

Salmon runs also are an especially important component of the northwest economy and culture, particularly for the Native American tribes who live there. The tribes have invested in hatcheries and habitat projects in cooperation with other regional interests to support the runs. All of the dams in the Lower Columbia and Snake Rivers have fish passage, and no doubt this function can be further improved with investments in new technology and systems.

¹ Pacific Northwest Waterways Association – *Columbia Snake River System Facts*. <https://www.pnwa.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/CSRS.pdf>

² The Maritime Executive – *Barge Transport Wins on Fuel Efficiency*. <https://maritime-executive.com/article/barge-transport-wins-on-fuel-efficiency>

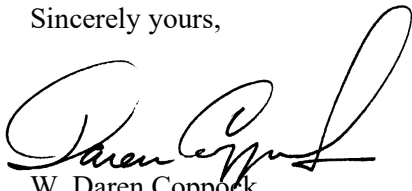
³ Washington Association of Wheat Growers – *Facts about U.S. Wheat Exports and the Columbia Snake River System*. <https://www.wawg.org/facts-about-u-s-wheat-exports-and-the-columbia-snake-river-system/>

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The bottom line is that ways can be found through innovation and cooperation to have the benefits of the dams and healthy salmon runs, but to do that we must move beyond the impractical and ruinous idea of dam breaching. Economic interests will be much more willing to contribute if they don't find it necessary to defend themselves from extreme proposals that should have been permanently dismissed decades ago.

Thank you for holding this hearing. Hopefully it will be a turning point away from contentious controversy toward cooperation on practical solutions that will work for everyone.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "W. Daren Coppock". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

W. Daren Coppock
President & CEO