



**Port of
Whitman
County**

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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Port of Whitman County encourages public comment of river system

First public comment meeting slated for March 17 at Lewiston Red Lion Hotel

Colfax (March 2, 2020) — As national interest turns to the Columbia River System, the Port of Whitman County encourages the Palouse community to make their voices heard.

The Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and Bonneville Power Administration released a draft environmental impact statement on the operation of the Columbia River System on Friday, February 28. This started the clock on a 45-day comment period, which ends April 13.

The release of the 5,000-page report represents a significant milestone, as the Army Corps of Engineers last conducted an environmental impact study on the river system in 2002.

“It has been 18 years since the last time we had this opportunity,” said Joe Poire, Executive Director. “These opportunities are rare and should not be wasted. As people from all over the nation weigh in on this document with their interests, we who live at ground zero have this same opportunity.”

The Port believes the preferred alternative identified in the Columbia River System Operations Draft Environmental Impact Statement (CRSO DEIS) rightly avoids the extreme measure of dam breaching.

The loss of barging would be detrimental to Whitman County and our reputation as the nation’s leading producer of wheat.

More than 1,100 farms risk bankruptcy if the federal government does not increase farm subsidies. With wheat prices already down near the break-even point, annual direct payments to farmers would need a boost of \$38.8 million to maintain current income levels.

In addition, the loss of irrigation of nearly 48,000 acres would result in a \$500 million social welfare loss.

The consequences of dam breaching – far from solely impacting agricultural communities such as Whitman County – would be felt across the greater Northwest region.



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The draft EIS concludes that power blackouts could become a reality. Without the 14 federal dams on the Columbia and Snake Rivers, the threat of region-wide blackouts would double – a crisis for which we are not prepared.

“I can’t remember having a blackout in my lifetime living here,” Poire said.

Breaching the lower Snake River dams could also cost up to an additional \$1 billion annually to replace the energy alone and raise customer rates by 25 percent or more.

In addition, replacing the dams with natural gas generation would add 3.3 million metric tons of CO₂ to the region every year.

“River navigation produces the most energy-efficient, low-carbon emission transportation system in the nation,” Poire said. “It is human nature for people to take for granted the low-cost, clean energy that hydropower produces, while demanding there be no impact.”

By identifying the preferred alternative, federal agencies acknowledge the world-class investments in fish passage facilities completed over the years that now allow over 95 percent of fish to pass each of the federal dams safely. Breaching the dams would pose very negative consequences to our community while yielding only marginal improvements to salmon recovery.

The Port remains hopeful this report will serve as a positive communication tool to discuss the myriad benefits of the Columbia-Snake River System.

“I hope when people from other parts of the country read this report it helps them understand why people in the region feel so strongly about retaining this river system,” Poire said.

The first and nearest opportunity for Palouse residents to provide public comment will take place 4-8 p.m. Tuesday, March 17, at the Lewiston Red Lion Hotel, 621 21st St. Verbal comment up to two minutes in length may be given publicly or privately. During the meeting, computers will be available for online comment submittal, or written comments may be deposited in a collection box.

Between now and April 13, written comments may be submitted online, via postal mail or by delivery. For details, please visit crso.info.

The Port will provide fact sheets and other resources during the 45-day comment period at www.portwhitman.com. Port staff are also at the ready to assist members of the public in understanding and forming comments on the draft EIS at 509-397-3791.

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Additional information on the Snake River Dams is available from the following organizations:

- Pacific Northwest Waterways Association- <http://www.snakeriverdams.com/>
<http://ourworkingrivers.com/our-rivers/snake-river>
- Northwest RiverPartners- <http://nwrivernpartners.org/snake-river-dams/>
- Bonneville Power Administration- <https://www.bpa.gov/news/pubs/FactSheets/fs-201603-A-Northwest-energy-solution-Regional-power-benefits-of-the-lower-Snake-River-dams.pdf>

About the Port of Whitman County

The Port of Whitman County is dedicated to improving the quality of life for all citizens of Whitman County through industrial real estate development, preservation of multi-modal transportation, facilitation of economic development and provision of on-water recreational opportunities.