The Lower Snake River Dams: Our Perspective

Much has been reported recently about Snake River's dams. The Snake River has 15 dams, from the Rocky Mountains to Lake Wallula. But the lowest four generate power sold by the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA).

Some want the four Lower Snake dams torn down — the Lower Granite, Little Goose, Lower Monumental, and Ice Harbor dams. We think that’s an idea that’s not backed up by science, and it would require an act of Congress to make this happen. The BPA’s system has 33 dams, but the Lower Snake dams are some of the most productive. They can generate over 3,000 megawatts — enough clean electricity to power 2.4 million homes — without putting more carbon in our air.

Cost

Engineers estimate it would cost $1.3 to $2.6 billion to tear down these four dams. It’s unclear who would pay those costs, since customers of utilities including Central Lincoln paid to build these dams, and pay the ongoing costs to generate and manage power at them.

Fish

Thanks to investments in fish passage, supported by the rates utility customers pay the BPA, the four Lower Snake dams are on track to achieve 96% survival rates for young spring Chinook and steelhead migrating downstream, and 93% for young summer-migrating fish.

Shipping & Irrigation

The Snake River dams support shipping for farm products, primarily wheat, for the international market. Shipping by barge is less polluting than by trucks or trains. Further, dams support farmers by reserving water for irrigation in months with low rainfall.

Orcas

“Southern resident” orcas spend most of their time in the coastal inland waters of the Salish Sea, a system of waterways serving Northwest Washington and British Columbia, including Puget Sound. NOAA Fisheries study shows Chinook from the rivers that feed into Salish Sea are these orcas’ primary source of food, not fish from the Columbia and Snake rivers which drain directly into the Pacific Ocean.

Replacement

If the Lower Snake dams were torn down, the power they produce would need to be replaced to prevent brownouts or blackouts. Wind and solar farms would not only be very, very expensive, large areas of land would be required for them. Hydropower meets our power needs when they’re highest—in winter. Solar power is reduced by winter’s shorter days, and often grey skies. The most viable alternative to the dams is natural gas, which would put up to three million metric tons of carbon into our air every year, and the additional costs are estimated to be $274 million to $372 million a year.

Even in a Pandemic, the Power Will Keep Flowing

The last very serious pandemic was in 1957; more than 100,000 Americans died. Those who were living here then may remember there weren’t any significant outages. We are doing what we always do to keep your power on.

Questions? Comments? Email us at info@clpud.org

The Ice Harbor Dam is 12 miles east of Pasco, Washington on the Lower Snake River. (Photo courtesy of the Bonneville Power Administration)
Your Monthly Payments Could Be the Same Each Month with Budget Billing

Sign Ups Close June 30 for this year

Our Budget Billing program works like a savings plan: Budget Billing customers pay a set amount each month, meaning more funds are collected on their electricity bills in summer and fall months, when electricity bills usually are lower. Those extra dollars build up over time, and help cover higher bills in winter.

If you’ve lived at the same address for 12 months or more, and have a good payment history, you may be eligible to sign up. Because every customer’s situation is different, sign ups must be done by calling us at 877-265-3211, and pressing “4,” Mondays-Thursdays, 7 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. You’ll need to start with a $0 balance.

If you’re already on Budget Billing, please know Budget Billing accounts are reviewed every April, and if there’s a credit balance, that amount is deducted from the new monthly payment amount for the coming year. If there’s a balance owing, that amount is spread out over the following year with a small increase to the monthly payment amount.

Budget Billing is only available to residential customers. Budget Billing accounts are reviewed periodically to make certain any balance owing isn’t too high. If it is, the monthly payment amount may be adjusted.

Staying at Home May Mean Higher Electricity Bills

If you have someone working from home while sheltering in place, or kids home all day instead of at school, your electricity bill may jump due to higher use. If you’d like to check, go to clpud.org, and click on “Pay My Bill.” That will take you to our SmartHub site. Click on “View Usage.” (If you haven’t yet signed up for SmartHub, it’s easy: Click on “Sign up to access our Self Service site” and follow the prompts.)

SmartHub’s “My Usage” feature offers several ways to view your electricity use. Click on Average Usage to see your use by month, week, and even time of day—just choose which you’d like to view. My Usage even shows the temperature outside so you can determine if weather has had an impact on your electricity use.

If you are struggling to pay your Central Lincoln bill, please be sure to call us at 877-265-3211 and press “4” to discuss payment arrangements. Thank you.

Call us toll free at 1-877-265-3211 to report an outage, pay your bill, speak to a customer service representative and more. Your call will be answered by the first customer service representative available in Florence, Newport, or Reedsport.

Pay By Phone: 1-877-265-3211, and press “1”
Energy Efficiency Programs: 1-888-883-9879

Office Hours: New!
Mondays-Thursdays 7 a.m.-5:30 p.m. (closed Fridays)
Florence: 966 Highway 101
Newport: 2129 N. Coast Highway
Reedsport: 440 Fir Avenue (Closed from 12:30-1 p.m. Mondays-Thursdays, closed Fridays.)

Website: clpud.org
Email: info@clpud.org
Outage info, energy-saving tips, and latest news:

Twitter: www.twitter.com/CLPUD
Website: Central Lincoln PUD

Our mission is to ensure our communities have access to reliable and affordable energy products and services.