

HABITAT COMMITTEE REPORT ON HABITAT ISSUES

Summary and Background on the Notice of Intent to Prepare a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement for the Columbia River System Operations

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Bureau of Reclamation issued a [Notice of Intent](#) (NOI) on December 18, 2024, to prepare a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) for the Columbia River System Operations (CRSO). This follows the 2020 CRSO Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and is necessary to address proposed changes, new environmental information, and potential adverse effects that have emerged since the original decision.

The comment deadline on the NOI is May 9, 2025, and the Co-Lead Agencies plan to hold virtual public meetings the week of April 7. The Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) commented on the 2020 CRSO EIS and it may be beneficial for the Council to comment on the NOI for the Supplemental EIS. The states and Tribes are working to coordinate comments on the NOI. Pending that coordination, the Habitat Committee (HC) intends to prepare a draft comment letter on behalf of the Council in mid-April using the Quick Response procedure. The HC has not yet developed specific recommendations for Council consideration. However, additional background and key topics below may be included in a Council comment letter.

Background

The Columbia River System (CRS) includes 14 federally operated dams in the Columbia River Basin across Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington. These dams serve multiple purposes, including flood risk management, power generation, navigation, fish and wildlife conservation, recreation, and municipal and industrial water supply. Since the 2020 CRSO EIS, legal challenges have been filed against its conclusions, and litigation has been on hold while federal agencies, states, and tribal nations engaged in negotiations. This resulted in the 2023 Resilient Columbia Basin Agreement (RCBA), which provided a framework for staying litigation and committing to further environmental analyses, including reviewing system operations, energy needs, tribal circumstances, and fish conservation measures.

The SEIS will evaluate updated and changed circumstances that include, but are not limited to:

- Operations, maintenance, and configuration of the 14 projects of the CRSO
- New species listed or proposed for listing under the Endangered Species Act (e.g., Wolverine)
- Commitments with the RCBA
- Relevant reports, studies and other information published since the 2020 CRSO EIS
- Anticipated changes in Columbia River inflows from Canada and operational effects in the U.S. related to the modernization of the Columbia River Treaty

The Notice states that the full range of resources analyzed in the CRSO EIS will be assessed in the Supplemental EIS for potential effects due to proposed changes or changed conditions and circumstances. These resources include: river hydrology and hydraulics; water quality; aquatic habitat, invertebrates, and fish; vegetation, wetlands, wildlife, and floodplains; power generation

and transmission; air quality and greenhouse gases; flood risk management; navigation and transportation; recreation; water supply; visual and noise resources; fisheries and passive use; cultural resources; Indian trust assets, tribal perspectives, and tribal interests; environmental justice; and implementation and system costs.

The Council submitted comment letters in [2020](#) on the draft EIS and in [2016](#) on the EIS scoping. Those comments centered around anadromous fish passage at Federal Columbia River Power System dams, habitat improvements in the Snake River, impacts and mitigation related to climate change, and the analysis related recreational, commercial, and tribal fisheries. Further details can be found in the Council's prior comment letters.

The HC will develop a proposed comment letter for Council consideration via the Council's Quick Response procedure described in [Council Operating Procedure 1](#).

PFMC
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