

Q & A: The Murray-Inslee Study

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What is the Murray-Inslee Study?

In October 2021 Governor Jay Inslee and Senator Patty Murray announced a process to determine whether there are reasonable means for replacing the benefits provided by the lower Snake River dams (LSRD) sufficient to support dam breaching. The process will build on previously conducted research and includes outreach to interested parties across the Pacific Northwest. The Governor's Office hired Kramer Consulting and Ross Strategic (Consultant Team) to support the Inslee/Murray process.

The Study was announced in October 2021 with a goal to release a draft by the end of May 2022. The draft will open for public comment for four weeks after the draft goes public. The Consultant team will then prepare a final report which is scheduled to be released in mid to late July. Governor Inslee and Senator Murray have said that they will use the report to inform their decision on whether to recommend removal of the LSRD, which they have committed to announcing no later than July 31, 2022.

The Murray-Inslee process is part of a larger set of initiatives to review policies affecting the Columbia River Basin. Numerous reviews have called into question the decades-long federal approach to the system and have placed a strong emphasis on breaching the LSRD.

Hasn't there already been an EIS and comment period?

Yes—several, in fact. Since salmon were first listed as endangered in the 1990's, every administration since President Clinton's has produced an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to analyze and propose policies related to management of the Columbia Basin for salmon recovery. The process of producing these EIS's involves inputs from experts across multiple federal agencies and a high degree of public consultation and stakeholder input.

The last EIS, published in September 2020, included an analysis on the impacts of LSRD removal. This last EIS did not recommend dam breaching due to the negative impacts removal would have on greenhouse gas emissions, energy costs, and grid reliability. Pro-breach groups sued in order to try to force removal of the dams.

Why now?

In addition to Senator Murray and Governor Inslee, the Biden Administration is examining questions related to management of the entire Columbia River Basin, salmon recovery, and dam breaching. We anticipate all three will have significant policy announcements this year regarding these issues.

Can I make a difference?

Absolutely. If you care about the cost of energy, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, supporting Northwest agriculture, ensuring a reliable grid, keeping local communities afloat, and protecting our most vulnerable populations from the challenges and impacts of climate change, then now is the time to be heard. Too often, these issues are misrepresented or unaddressed. We can't let that happen this time. Your story is vital to broadening the conversation so that all costs are included and understood. To keep pace with the changing landscape, it is important to keep your voice at the table.