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Lawmakers warn Biden on Snake River dam secret package

By MATTHEW WEAVER Capital Press
Nov 22, 2023

Republican lawmakers continue to warn President Joe Biden about secret plans developed by the White House Council on Environmental Quality and plaintiffs in a long-running lawsuit over the four lower Snake River dams.

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Ice Harbor Dam, one of four dams on the lower Snake River.

Associated Press File

Republican Sens. Jim Risch and Mike Crapo of Idaho and Steve Daines of Montana sent a letter to Biden to discuss their concerns that his recent actions to advance salmon restoration would be one-sided and negatively affect stakeholders, including electricity ratepayers and farmers, who rely on the river system to send products to market via barge.

"...(R)ecent activities indicate the possibility for actions that have been rejected by Congress and lack scientific grounding," the letter states. "This distracts from the opportunity to find genuine consensus and actually conduct effective salmon conservation."

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Recent salmon return numbers indicated that policies implemented by past Democrat and Republican administrations are working, the senators wrote.

The data show that ocean conditions, not in-river migration, are the critical determinant in salmon survival and recovery, they said.

"Rather than focusing attention on controversial proposals that won't be implemented by Congress or plans that have buy-in from only a limited portion of those who rely on the river system, we urge you to return to efforts that build on regional consensus, are grounded in science, and can be supported and implemented by Congress," the letter states.

In another letter, Northwest House Republicans asked CEQ Chair Brenda Mallory to immediately share the developed "package of actions and commitments" the government and lawsuit plaintiffs have negotiated, by a Dec. 1 deadline.

The government and plaintiffs have indicated they hope to present the package in court by Dec. 15.

The letter is signed by Reps. Dan Newhouse and Cathy McMorris Rodgers of Washington; Cliff Bentz of Oregon and Russ Fulcher of Idaho.

Both letters underline that only Congress has the authority to order breaching of the dam — a goal of environmental groups and tribes — or change their authorized purpose.

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"This is statutory fact, and we warn the administration not to attempt to circumvent that fact through clever wordsmithing," the lawmakers write.

The letter adds that the lawmakers are "deeply concerned" by any actions that reduce "the historic and necessary" independence of the Bonneville Power Administration's ratemaking decisions, or any effort to "saddle" ratepayers with missions beyond BPA responsibilities or costs that should be properly borne by taxpayers.

"We will oppose through all means necessary actions that violate these tenets," the letter states.

Senators' letter to Biden 224.52 KB

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House Republicans' letter to CEQ 133.48 KB

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Matthew Weaver

Field Reporter, Spokane

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