



News Release
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Make Salmon and River Health a priority in the Columbia River Treaty
Public comment period ends on August 16 on how U.S. and Canada co-manage the Columbia River

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Spokane – On Friday, [Sierra Club leaders in the Northwest sent a letter](#) to federal agencies preparing the United States’ negotiating position on the Columbia River Treaty calling on their nation to prioritize salmon and river health. The United States and Canada are preparing to re-negotiate the 50-year-old treaty.

“The Treaty’s benefits in hydropower and flood control for the United States and Canada came with wrenching costs for Tribes and First Nations, salmon and the river’s health,” said Rhett Lawrence, Conservation Director for Sierra Club’s Oregon Chapter. “A modernized Treaty must help both nations jointly prepare the Columbia and Snake watersheds with resilience and health for the climate change that is upon us.”

The Columbia River Treaty was ratified in 1964 and is an agreement between the United States and Canada on how to manage the heavily dammed Columbia River, formerly the richest salmon-producing river on earth. The Treaty is up for re-negotiation. The current purposes of the Treaty are just two: generating hydropower and controlling floods. Conservationists are asking the U.S. to expand the Treaty to a third purpose: restoring salmon and river health (called “Ecosystem-based Function”).

On August 6, the United States announced that long-awaited environmental analysis was being withheld from public review to make it unavailable to Canada. “The public has until August 16 to provide input into the United States’ negotiating position,” said Edwina Allen, chair of Sierra Club’s Idaho Chapter. “We are concerned about the United States’ decision to withhold environmental analysis from the public review process. The United States needs to be transparent, take the time necessary to complete the science,

and make informed decisions about the Columbia River.”

The Sierra Club supports six fundamental changes to the old Treaty:

- (1) Salmon and river health (“Ecosystem-based Function”) should become a co-equal purpose with power production and flood control.
- (2) Fish passage at the dams should be provided to allow for the return of salmon and other native species to the Upper Columbia and other headwater tributaries – benefiting jobs and local economies.
- (3) Energy efficiency and renewable energy sources should be promoted in the modernized Treaty.
- (4) Flood risk should be modified to incorporate flexibility including higher flood triggers, improved forecasting science, and limiting future development in flood plains.
- (5) The United States and Canada should coordinate to make climate change science, planning, management and response an explicit component of Treaty implementation. To protect already struggling salmon in the face of climate change, more water should not be diverted from the Columbia River for consumptive uses until the needs of salmon and a healthy river are met.
- (6) For Treaty negotiations and implementation, the United States should add a federal agency with ecosystem focus and responsibility (such as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service), as well as full and equal participation for the Tribes that recognizes their sovereignty.

“The [Working Draft](#) as currently written will not adequately modernize the Columbia River Treaty for our present and future realities and challenges,” said John Osborn, Spokane physician who coordinates Sierra Club’s Columbia River Project. “We are requesting substantial changes in the United States position on the future of the Columbia River.”

Deadline for public comment is August 16. Public comments can be sent to treatyreview@bpa.gov

Links:

- [Sierra Club letter to U.S. Entity](#)
- [U.S. Entity Cover Letter and Working Draft Recommendations](#)
- [Columbia River Treaty](#) (blog)