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NORTHWEST POWER AND CONSERVATION COUNCIL DRAFT 2026
COLUMBIA RIVER BASIN FISH AND WILDLIFE PROGRAM

PUBLIC HEARING

TRANSCRIPT OF NORTHWEST POWER AND CONSERVATION
COUNCIL DRAFT 2026 COLUMBIA RIVER BASIN FISH AND
WILDLIFE PROGRAM

PUBLIC HEARING

HELD ON

THURSDAY, JANUARY 29, 2026

4:01 P.M.

KALISPELL, MONTANA

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1 APPEARANCES

2
3 NORWEST POWER AND CONSERVATION COUNCIL:

4 Mike Milburn, Montana Council Chair, NWPCC

5 Douglas Grob, Montana Council Member, NWPCC

6 Kym Buzdygon,

7 Public Affairs Division Director, NWPCC

8 Kerry Berg, Policy Analyst, NWPCC

9 Kris Homel, Biologist, NWPCC

10 Brian Dekiep, Policy Analyst, NWPCC

11
12 PUBLIC ATTENDEES:

13 McGregor Rhodes, Self

14 Terry Crooks, Flathead Electric Company

15 Paul McKenzie, F.H. Stolze Land & Lumber Company

16 Pam Holmquist, Flathead County

17 William Myers Jr.,

18 Bayside Park and Marine Center, LLC

19 Matt Boyer, MFWP

20 Jason Williams, Flathead Electric Company

21 Chris Sidmore, Flathead Food Bank

22 Lorraine Clarno, Kalispell Chamber of Commerce

23 Mark Johnson, Flathead Electric Company

24 Kyle Cram, Weyerhaeuser

25 Katie Pfennigs, Flathead Electric Company

APPEARANCES CONTINUED

PUBLIC ATTENDEES:

Pady Dusing, Self

Joe Kolman, Montana Electric Co-op Association

Lynn Ducharme, CSKT

Alan Ruby, Flathead Electric Company

1 PUBLIC HEARING

2 HELD ON

3 THURSDAY, JANUARY 29, 2026

4 4:01 P.M.

5
6 MR. MILBURN: I've got a -- I've got a
7 statement that I have to read to you all. I'll zip
8 through it as quick as I can. I'll call the meeting
9 to order.

10 My name is Mike Milburn. I'm a member of
11 the Northwest Power and Conversation Council from
12 the State of Montana, and currently the chair of the
13 Council. I'd like to welcome you to the -- today's
14 public hearing on the Council's Draft 2026 Columbia
15 River Basin Fish and Wildlife Program. Anyone
16 wishing to provide public comment should sign up on
17 the list provided at the back of the room. When the
18 time comes to hear your comments, I will call people
19 up to testify in the order in which you signed up.

20 As the first order of business, I have a
21 statement to make for the administrative record
22 about this public hearing. Under the Northwest
23 Power Act, the Northwest Power and Conversation
24 Council adopts and periodically and periodically
25 amends a program to protect, mitigate, and enhance

1 fish and wildlife affected by the development and
2 operation of hydroelectric facilities on the
3 Columbia River and its tributaries.

4 The current version of the program is the
5 2014 Columbia River Basin Fish and Wildlife Program
6 and a 2020 addendum. The Council's in the process
7 of amending this Fish and Wildlife Program in a
8 formal amendment process under the Act. We recently
9 released a draft of the 2026 Fish and Wildlife
10 Program.

11 The Council's now at the stage of the
12 amendment process where we are receiving public
13 comment on that Draft Fish and Wildlife Program.
14 The formal comment period extends March -- until
15 March 2, 2026. The Council is conducting public
16 hearings like this one to receive oral comments on
17 the draft. We have a court reporter in attendance
18 to record your comments. A transcript of this
19 hearing will be circulated to all Council members
20 and staff and will be included in the administrative
21 record for this program amendment process.

22 The Council is also accepting written
23 comments on the -- on the Fish and Wildlife Program
24 until March 2nd. Instructions for how to comment in
25 writing are on the Council's website. You can also

1 ask any staff in the room. The Council will
2 consider all the oral and written comments on the
3 Draft Program when making final decision on the 2026
4 Fish and Wildlife Program. The Council is -- is
5 expecting to make a decision on the final program in
6 May of this year.

7 We're going to be running this until 6:00.
8 We have a number of you that have signed up. More
9 may be coming in. I'll just ask everyone -- like I
10 said, we'll -- we'll go by the order that's on the
11 sheet. I'll just ask everyone to keep it short,
12 concise, to the point. We generally try to keep it
13 around three minutes, so if you could just keep that
14 into consideration, the time.

15 Make sure everybody has signed up. And we
16 are going to have our Council staff, which is going
17 to be you, Kris, right?

18 MS. HOMEL: Yep, that's right.

19 MR. MILBURN: Give us an overview.

20 Thanks, Kris.

21 MS. HOMEL: Thank you, Chair Milburn.

22 Can you -- can everyone hear me okay?

23 Okay. Great. Well, good evening,
24 everyone, and welcome to this public hearing on the
25 Northwest Power and Conservation Council's Draft

1 2026 Columbia River Basin Fish and Wildlife Program.
2 My name is Kris. I'm a biologist in the Council's
3 central office in Portland. And I'm going to give a
4 short presentation on the Council and our program,
5 and then we'll open up for public comment.

6 The Council was created by Congress under
7 the Northwest Power Act of 1980 to give the Pacific
8 Northwest a greater voice in power planning and
9 protecting fish and wildlife. The Council is an
10 interstate compact agency representing the basin
11 states of Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington.
12 The governor of each state appoints two members.

13 The Northwest Power Act requires the
14 Council to develop with public participation a
15 regional power plan and a fish and wildlife program.
16 Federal agencies, including Bonneville Power
17 Administration, the Bureau of Reclamation, the Army
18 Corps of Engineers, and the Federal Energy
19 Regulatory Commission all have legal
20 responsibilities under the Act.

21 MS. BUZDYGON: I actually don't that think
22 the mic is working. I wonder if we switch you for
23 Mike's -- Mike's mic and we'll --

24 MS. HOMEL: Yeah. I don't have, like, a
25 -- there isn't a volume button on it.

1 MS. BUZDYGON: Kerry -- Kerry's gone to
2 find someone from the hotel to maybe get it sorted,
3 so hopefully get it sorted, so that's good.

4 MS. HOMEL: Okay. Is that better?

5 MR. MILBURN: Yep.

6 MS. HOMEL: So first I'll briefly touch on
7 our role in power planning. The Council must evolve
8 a 20-year regional power plan to ensure an adequate,
9 efficient, economical, and reliable power supply for
10 the Pacific Northwest. The Council considers how
11 much energy the region will need and what resources
12 are available to meet that need, beginning with
13 energy efficiency.

14 The Council's power plan guides Bonneville
15 Power Administration's acquisition of cost-effective
16 resources. It also serves as an important technical
17 resource for the region. The power plan is reviewed
18 and revised every five years. The draft of the next
19 power plan, which we're calling the 9th Power Plan,
20 is expected mid-2026. As with this Fish and
21 Wildlife Program, there will be multiple
22 opportunities for public comments on the Power Plan,
23 and we really hope to hear from you.

24 The Council's Fish and Wildlife Program is
25 updated about every five years based primarily on

1 the recommendations from state and federal fish and
2 wildlife agencies and tribes, along with other
3 partners as directed by the Northwest Power Act.

4 The Fish and Wildlife Program is intended to
5 protect, mitigate, and enhance all fish and wildlife
6 impacted by the hydropower system. It includes
7 onsite mitigation measures at the dams like changes
8 to flow and passage, and offsite mitigation measures
9 like habitat restoration and artificial production
10 at hatcheries.

11 The Council's Fish and Wildlife Program
12 has been in place for over 40 years. It is one of
13 the largest mitigation efforts in the world, and it
14 covers an area roughly equivalent to France. It's
15 grown and evolved over time based on the best
16 available science. And while progress is evident,
17 the Council recognizes that more work remains to be
18 done.

19 Over the 40-year life of the program,
20 there have been significant accomplishments.
21 Changes to how the hydro system operates, as well as
22 improved passage at dams has benefited both adult
23 and juvenile migration. Habitat work has protected,
24 restored, or improved hundreds of thousands of acres
25 of land across the region.

1 The Columbia Basin Water Transactions
2 Program has collaborated with willing landowners and
3 irrigation districts to keep water in streams when
4 fish need it. Artificial production programs
5 support both conservation and harvest objectives,
6 and over 1,800 fish screens have been installed and
7 maintained to keep fish out of irrigation systems,
8 and that's just to name a few.

9 Next, I'll talk about how the Fish and
10 Wildlife Program gets updated. There are many steps
11 that we have to take to amend the Fish and Wildlife
12 Program, beginning with the call for recommendations
13 that went out to the region in January 2025, and
14 then the subsequent public comment period. We
15 released a Draft Program in December 2025, and we're
16 not accepting comments on that Draft until March
17 2nd. The Council's goal is to release a final Fish
18 and Wildlife Program in May of 2026, and you can see
19 that circled up here on our timeline.

20 We received hundreds of recommendations
21 and thousands of comments on those recommendations
22 during this amendment process. And the Council has
23 considered them very carefully over the last six
24 months. Over the course of this review, some topics
25 seem to be of particular urgency or importance to

1 the region.

2 Priorities identified for the Draft
3 Program include making sure that the -- that assets
4 and projects have the funding they need to continue
5 to function and benefit fish, having consistent and
6 stable hydro operations over a long period of time
7 that keep water moving, increased velocities and
8 minimized fluctuations.

9 Assessing and managing predation in the
10 areas most likely to increase salmon and steelhead
11 survival and continuing the crucial habitat work
12 that is a cornerstone of the Fish and Wildlife --
13 excuse me. Fish and Wildlife Program. The Council
14 is also placing particular emphasis at this time on
15 coordinating with other relevant agencies to
16 identify sources of non-rapiar funding.

17 So a couple logistics here. Chair Milburn
18 mentioned the signup sheets on the back here. If
19 you have any question, you'll see staff here. We've
20 got our name badges on. The bathrooms are right
21 around the corner when you go outside. So I know
22 you all week, but it's on the screen. Please be
23 courteous to council members, staff, and others in
24 the room. Please keep your comments brief and on
25 topic. And important to note, your comments will

1 become part of the official record.

2 If you have brought a written copy of your
3 comments, please hand them to staff after you speak.
4 You can also submit comments online if you would
5 prefer. If you scan this QR code up on the screen,
6 that will take you to our program amendment site
7 where you can submit comments. And that's all I
8 have. We're excited to hear from you all and thank
9 you for being here today. I'll pass this back to
10 Chair Milburn.

11 MR. MILBURN: Thank you. Thank you.

12 And I want to introduce Doug. Doug Grob
13 is our other council member from Montana. Two staff
14 from Montana is Brian Dekiep and Kerry Berg.
15 Kerry's in the back there, and Kym is in the very
16 back from Portland. Her staff and Kris.

17 So first -- first let's put my glasses on
18 so I can read.

19 McGregor Rhodes, you're going to be first
20 and followed by Terry Crooks. And if you could, as
21 you come forward, if you could state your name, and
22 if it's not obvious spelling, spell it for us. And
23 you can come here to do that.

24 MR. RHODES: I'm going to need more than
25 three minutes, so you might want me later, but.

1 MR. MILBURN: You've got three minutes.
2 So you can put it in writing if -- if it's longer
3 than that. So we'll try to keep it around three
4 minutes. But if -- if -- if you do have something
5 that's going to go over, put it in writing, we'll
6 read it.

7 Also, if there's -- people are saying the
8 same thing in front of you, just come up and you can
9 just say that I support what so and so said, so
10 we're not -- you know, if it's repetitive or
11 something like that, we're not.

12 MR. RHODES: Can I speak at the end if I
13 need more time?

14 MR. MILBURN: Sure. Yeah. We'll see what
15 we can -- we can make work. Or you can talk to us,
16 you know, just individually, too, at the end, so.

17 MR. RHODES: My name's McGregor Rhodes.
18 Can you hear me okay?

19 MR. MILBURN: You bet.

20 MR. RHODES: I've lived in Lincoln County
21 for 20 years near the Kootenai River. That's going
22 to be the scope of my testimony today. The Kootenai
23 River was the second largest -- is the second
24 largest river in the State of Montana. It was the
25 most productive for fish in Montana before the dams

1 were built. Libby Dam destroyed 90 miles of the
2 river, 50 in the U.S.A. and 40 in Canada.

3 That 40 mile in Canada is mud flats, quite
4 a -- quite -- quite a portion of the year. Almost
5 40,000 acres were destroyed by the dam, the
6 reservoir, the railroad. They had to reroute the
7 Transcontinental Railroad. They dug the longest
8 tunnel in North America under Elk Mountain at 7
9 miles long. They built two new highways. They
10 destroyed towns, homes, farms, ranches, grazing
11 land, low elevation forest, habitats for all kinds
12 of animals and birds. And it's all gone. The dam
13 was a disaster.

14 And their impoundment behind Libby Dam's
15 not a lake, it's a reservoir. It fluctuates,
16 silting up. They called it a lake to make more
17 politically correct to sound like it was something
18 good, but it's really not. I think the plan needs
19 more emphasis on restoring -- restoring fish and
20 wildlife to -- to -- to this area, the freshwater
21 fishery and the wildlife in Northwest Montana.

22 There were sturgeon in the river. As far
23 as I know, there's been no natural spawning since
24 the dam was -- since the dam was built due to the
25 reduced flows and the water chemistry. The bull

1 trout were blocked and spawning above the dam area.
2 The burbot or ling cod were the most -- were the
3 most volume -- the most fish by volume in the river,
4 and they're gone. They're -- they -- they -- they
5 couldn't adapt to that.

6 The -- the river's threatened by selenium
7 coming from the Teck Mines in Canada. The survival
8 of the fish and aquatic insects are getting hammered
9 up there. It's getting worse. There's no end in
10 sight. I hope the Council cooperates with the
11 International Joint Commission to try to stop this
12 pollution. I know it's -- maybe you can do
13 something to help just advise to the -- to the --
14 your National Joint Commission.

15 So far, the Canadian government has no
16 interest in -- in reducing the pollution. Canada is
17 -- they don't really care about the environment up
18 there, and I don't think they're going to do
19 anything unless they're forced to.

20 Let's see. The didymo algae below the dam
21 is caused by a phosphorous deficiency in the water.
22 The phosphorous leaches out in the reservoir. The
23 didymo algae prospers or phosphate deficient water,
24 and it's -- coats the bottom of the river with a
25 thick mat of algae preventing gravel -- fish to

1 get gravel, insects from reproducing. It's a bad
2 deal.

3 All a consequence of the dam. Nobody
4 thought about this when they built the dam. But
5 maybe you can help. There was a -- the only native
6 herd of Bighorn Mountain Sheep west of the
7 Continental Divide were up there and -- called the
8 Urel-Tweed Heard. They're barely hanging on. Their
9 habitat was destroyed by the dam. Big mess.
10 Anyway.

11 I could go on and on, but I want to -- I
12 looked at the website, and you had a history of your
13 -- of the Council. Well, I'm going to add a little
14 bit of that to the history today. I was a secretary
15 of the Libby Rod & Gun Club for 10 years, and we
16 used the Corps of Engineers to stop Phase 2 of Libby
17 Dam. Phase 2 was the construction of a Libby -- of
18 additional four units in the main dam, and a large
19 earthen-filled dam 10 miles below the main dam.
20 They was going to even out the water flow if they
21 got 8 turbines in the main dam.

22 Well, my Rod and Gun Club, we sued in
23 federal court. We stopped the Libby regulation dam.
24 The court ruled there was no congressional
25 authorization to build the dam. The Corps was

1 building the dam on their own with no authorization
2 from Congress. They had to stop. They did get one
3 more generator in as part of the negotiation, but
4 our lawsuit -- we proved in federal court that the
5 BPA, the Corps, and the PNUCC was lying about the
6 load growth projections, that they were too high.
7 We had our economist disbunk (sic) that. The courts
8 accepted that.

9 So Libby Dam was not converted to a pure
10 peaking power dam. And that's one of the reasons
11 the Council was formed, because when we stopped
12 peaking power and the WOPs plants closed, the
13 Northwest was in chaos. I went to a field hearing
14 -- a congressional field hearing in Spokane where we
15 hammered out some of the issues to -- to -- to start
16 the Council.

17 So I don't think anybody hardly ever knows
18 that. We proved in court that nature has a value.
19 Fishing, hunting, floating, bird watching can be
20 quantified for value.

21 MR. MILBURN: McGregor, can I have you
22 wrap it up? Because you've been five minutes.

23 MR. RHODES: Yeah. Well, if we have time
24 at the end of the hearing, I'd like to come back.

25 MR. MILBURN: Okay. No, that's very good.

1 And you did --

2 MR. RHODES: Because I've got some more
3 information that nobody knows about. But the main
4 thing is the dams -- the Libby Dam in particular was
5 a total disaster. The Council should do everything
6 in their power to try to remedy the damage that that
7 dam cost.

8 MR. MILBURN: Thank you and --

9 MR. RHODES: And I'd like to be able to
10 come back and finish what I have to say. Thank you.

11 MR. MILBURN: You got it. Very
12 interesting. Very good. Thank you.

13 And Terry, you're up.

14 MR. CROOKS: Yes. Thank you.

15 MR. MILBURN: Thank you. Give your name
16 and who you represent.

17 MR. CROOKS: I'm Terry Crooks from
18 Flathead Electric, I'm a trustee from District
19 Number 9. I'll stand, because I'm going to be
20 quick. The --

21 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I can't hear you.

22 MR. CROOKS: I'll try to talk louder.
23 Okay.

24 I'm Terry Crooks from District 9 Flathead
25 Electric. I'm a trustee there. So thanks for

1 inviting us. Thanks for doing this. You know, our
2 position on this is -- is need to really balance
3 what we're dealing with here. We certainly need
4 electricity, without it, our society just will not
5 survive. We love the rivers, we love the bull
6 trout, but somewhere we've got to find some kind of
7 balance. Thank you for working on that.

8 MR. MILBURN: Okay. Thank you.

9 All right. And next up we have Paul. Is
10 it -- Paul McKenzie. Yeah. Thank you, Paul.

11 MR. MCKENZIE: Yep. Good afternoon. For
12 the record, my name is Paul McKenzie. I'm the Vice
13 President and General Manager for F.H. Stoltze Land
14 & Lumber Company. We're on our 114th year of
15 operation this year. We're a family-owned company,
16 and we are in the forest management business. We're
17 located up in Columbia Falls, not very fare from the
18 Hungry Horse Dam.

19 We own about 38,000 acres of a tree farm.
20 We also provide forest management services to small
21 private, large private state and federal landowners
22 as well. We have a manufacturing plant on Halfmoon
23 Road in Columbia Falls that's been in continuous
24 operation since 1923. We employ 130 direct
25 employees and have about 300 people on our health

1 insurance plan. Just to kind of see what the
2 economic impact of our company is.

3 Additionally, we have another 70 to 80
4 folks that rely on us as contractors, and they
5 provide work for us in the -- in forest management,
6 and in support roles. We have a sawmill, dry kilns,
7 a plate mill, and the only woody biomass fired
8 cogeneration facility in the State of Montana. We
9 produce two-and-a-half megawatts of renewable,
10 baseload energy that is also with Flathead Electric
11 and supports or local communities.

12 We're small in the context of the greater
13 forest products industry, but we're kind of a big
14 deal here locally. We put about \$35 million a year
15 in spending into our local economy, and that's not
16 nothing and for the community of Columbia Falls. We
17 produce enough lumber to build about 5,000 homes
18 every year. And so that's -- just to give you a --
19 a context of the impact of our small company. And
20 the electricity we produce at our facility is enough
21 to pretty much keep the lights on in Columbia Falls
22 for those families that live and -- and work there.

23 Our company runs on three things: Logs,
24 people, and power. We produce products that are
25 used locally but are a part of global commodity

1 market. Maintaining affordable and dependable
2 supply of electricity is critical to continued the
3 viability of our company. As costs increase
4 dramatically on all fronts, we struggle to remain
5 competitive in a commodity market. But we can't
6 pass the increased costs of our production on to our
7 consumers.

8 The BPA productions of -- of similar
9 operational changes as being proposed in the plan
10 indicate up to a 17 -- potentially a 17 percent
11 increase in costs, and possibly reduced reliability,
12 especially in times of -- of high load. That's a
13 major concern for us, and those are impacts that I'm
14 not sure our company would actually survive.

15 If we can't continue operations due to
16 either unaffordable or unreliable electricity, the
17 consequences are far greater than just elimination
18 of the 130 family supporting jobs we have. Our
19 cogeneration facility most likely would not continue
20 to operate. So there's an additional two-and-a-half
21 megawatts of local power generation that would come
22 offline. That won't help our situation at all.

23 Roughly 8,000 acres of forest will not
24 receive vegetation management that -- that's
25 necessary for fuel hazard reduction, habitat

1 improvement, and the forest products that our -- our
2 -- our local community desperately needs. Those
3 building homes would have to look elsewhere for
4 their wood products or looking at importation or
5 alternatives to wood to meet their housing demands.

6 We have a rule of thumb in our business
7 that for every million board feet of timber
8 harvested in Montana, that creates 14 jobs. So for
9 us, for our company, that equates to about 530 jobs
10 that's supported by the forest management and the
11 manufacturing that we do. We're a company that
12 prides itself on operating with the core values of
13 stewardship and sustainability in our forest
14 management, in our manufacturing, in our community
15 impacts.

16 We are strong supporters of wildlife and
17 fisheries habitat conservation as proven by our --
18 our land management practices and our conservation
19 activities here in the valley. Those beliefs are
20 core to us both professionally and personally.
21 However, we also understand the need for balance
22 between wise use of our natural resources and
23 economic viability.

24 This is the very definition of
25 conservation and the core tenant of your

1 responsibility as Council. We ask you to please
2 give full consideration to the economic and
3 community impacts of your decisions and strive to
4 find a balance that prioritizes the continued flow
5 of affordable and reliable electricity for Northwest
6 Montana.

7 We have a saying at our company that's
8 healthy for us make for healthy family and health
9 communities. I think that concept applies well to
10 the work that you do, and -- and extends well to the
11 responsibilities that you have as a council member.
12 Finding that balance is a challenge, but we're all
13 up to it and here to work together. So thank you
14 for the opportunity to comment.

15 MR. MILBURN: Paul, thank you. I
16 appreciate it.

17 MR. MCKENZIE: Yep.

18 MR. MILBURN: And Pam Holmquist, and then
19 I'm going put on deck is William Myers.

20 Ma'am, thank you. If you could state your
21 name and who you represent.

22 MS. HOLMQUIST: Chair Milburn and members
23 of the Commission, my name is Pam Holmquist. That's
24 H-O-L-M-Q-U-I-S-T.

25 I have the honor of serving as a Flathead

1 County Commissioner. I speak on behalf of Flathead
2 County and about 120,000 residents. Flathead County
3 is about the size of the State of Connecticut.
4 We're home to natural wonders such as Glacier
5 National Park, Flathead Lake and the Bob Marshall
6 Wilderness. Our county residents care deeply about
7 fish and wildlife and the health of waterways and
8 public lands. That's why we live here.

9 At the same time, we depend on clean,
10 affordable, and reliable power from the Federal
11 Columbia River Power System to keep our lights on in
12 our homes and power our businesses. The system is
13 -- the system balances hydropower production,
14 transportation, and conservation. We are concerned
15 that the new fish and wildlife amendments would, if
16 implemented, push the system out of balance.

17 By further reducing operational
18 flexibility, we lose access to hydropower capacity
19 usually just when we need it the most such as during
20 period of high demand. This leads to higher
21 electricity rates for the residents of Flathead
22 County and also decreases system of reliability.

23 Our constituents are constantly citing
24 loss of living as their number one concern.
25 Saddling them with higher electric rates will only

1 exasperate that problem. Also, on the reliability
2 piece, a power outage in the middle of a Montana
3 winter storm, not simply an inconvenience, it can be
4 a matter of life and death. It then falls on county
5 emergency services to create contingency plans such
6 as shelters and warming centers to keep people,
7 specially those most vulnerable, among us from
8 freezing to death.

9 We urge the Council to consider the full
10 range of impacts of the fish and wildlife draft
11 amendments. The production of affordable and
12 reliable hydropower must continue to be a key
13 component of the system. I thank you very much for
14 this opportunity.

15 MR. MILBURN: Pam, thank you. Appreciate
16 it.

17 All right. We can have William Myers.

18 MR. MYERS: Hi.

19 MR. MILBURN: Good morning.

20 MR. MYERS: I am Myers -- Bill Myers. I
21 am representing Bayside Park and Marine Center down
22 in Big Fork. We own a -- a little piece of property
23 there as a marina for the last 25, 30 years. We're
24 in the process of selling it, under contract, but
25 we're still lienholders, so I still have a stake in

1 this. And I also am a member of a homeowner's
2 association further south in Big Fork on the lake
3 that has a little homeowner's harbor.

4 And am I speaking at a good voice level
5 for you folks? Is this good?

6 MR. MILBURN: You bet.

7 MR. MYERS: And so on two levels.
8 Concerned about lake levels and other issues. I
9 started coming to the -- what was I think called the
10 SOR, System Operation Review, in the 1990s. I would
11 often show up with two boxes, a banana box and an
12 apple box full of files including your own documents
13 show -- with yellow sticky notes so that I could
14 quickly pull them out and correct people if they
15 made wrong comments, which reluctantly often the
16 federal engineers made certain comments that needed
17 to be corrected.

18 I was part of the Power -- Power Planning
19 Council, I think it was, when Bruce Measure, I
20 think, was a member. I wasn't a member, I was --
21 would come to the hearings. That was a better way
22 of saying it.

23 MR. GROB: He was a member.

24 MR. MYERS: What?

25 MR. GROB: He was a member of the Council.

1 MR. MYERS: Yeah. And so I'd come and --
2 and participate and point out -- I think the
3 engineers were highly entertained when they had all
4 their numbers figured, and I pointed out, well, your
5 number up at Columbia Falls for flow is -- and your
6 number down in Polson at the Kerr Dam aren't the
7 only numbers you need to consider. You need to
8 consider irrigation being taken out of the river and
9 evaporation, which they hadn't considered. So I've
10 been part of the process for a long time.

11 My main concern has always been lake
12 levels of Flathead Lake, and I'm not going to deny
13 that. But we here are influenced by decisions
14 downstream, as you're well aware, as part of the
15 Bonneville System. During the process of the 1990s,
16 many fallacies were exposed. At the time, the
17 anadromous fish that you call salmon were the big
18 issue.

19 And many of us here point out we have
20 local issue that are -- have a different issue. And
21 I think Brian from FWP was here, you might remember
22 him. And -- and we did certain things to
23 accommodate fish here and downstream. We put in
24 tubes up at Hungry Horse you may be aware of for
25 selective withdrawal so we could have better

1 temperature control downstream for the fish.

2 And much of our regime has been based on
3 working with you folks downstream on this salmon
4 recovery. As you're well aware, Flathead Electric
5 has spent probably ourselves millions and I know the
6 combined of all the Northwest utilities is well
7 beyond millions, it may in the billions of dollars
8 by now, I don't know the exact number, on trying to
9 recover the salmon and -- and their -- strength and
10 their rege (Phonetic) and so forth upstream on the
11 rivers.

12 I'm totally against dam busting. That's
13 the first thing to say. And everybody that's been
14 part of these hearings knows that. And now I come
15 to find out that there's a different form of dam
16 busting doing incrementally where you're going to
17 reduce the power generation. So it's not dam
18 busting per say, but it's reducing power generation.

19 The first I became aware of this was a PBS
20 documentary that I saw probably a year or two ago
21 that you're probably familiar with, and it looks at
22 the life of orcas, killer whales, out just off the
23 Pacific Coast, Seattle, Portland area, and then
24 talks about the importance of salmon to their life
25 cycle and takes it all the way upstream to the

1 importance of salmon to eagles and grizzly bears and
2 other population when you look at the whole
3 ecosystem.

4 So there's a lot of issues involved here.
5 It's not -- as you know, not a simple one solution.
6 My comments today are -- and I did see last night,
7 of all nights, another documentary on PBS I've never
8 seen, it was about the orcas in either Antarctica or
9 the Arctic, I didn't even quite catch. But it was
10 about their life cycle there and how they're killing
11 seals and so forth.

12 So the one that I saw a couple years ago,
13 though, it was clear that the -- it was a political
14 agenda, and it was an agenda to say we're going to
15 have to reduce flows and generation, so we don't
16 have dissolved oxygen and all the issues for the
17 salmon.

18 Now let me make it clear: I have no
19 problem with salmon being in the river. Great.
20 Wonderful. Okay. But I think to say that we humans
21 out in the Northwest always have to pay the price
22 both financially and otherwise to contribute to the
23 salmons is a mistake.

24 I'd like to point out something, or I'm
25 going to say some things now radical and probably

1 upset some people, but you need to think about these
2 things. The salmon, the reason they're so important
3 is because other predators take them and utilize
4 them. Be it the orcas in the ocean, the grizzly
5 bears, and the eagles, and, maybe, native fisheries
6 in the Northwest who utilize salmon. So all those
7 are taking --

8 MR. MILBURN: William, I'm going to have
9 to ask you to wrap it up. You've been going for
10 five minutes.

11 MR. MYERS: Okay. Oh, I didn't know.
12 Okay. Sorry.

13 All those are taking from the salmon
14 population. So the radical solution, that I'm sure
15 isn't going to fly here, but I'll say it, is that
16 well, what about dealing with the orcas off of the
17 Pacific Coast and driving them away or hunting them?
18 Oh, that's not going to go very well with a lot of
19 people. What about killing some deer and leaving
20 them for the eagles and -- and grizzly bears to eat
21 so they don't need the salmon? There are other ways
22 of recovering the salmon without cutting us out.

23 And just one final comment, just so you
24 know here the sacrifices we make for people
25 downstream, our lake right now is within a foot of

1 full pool. And I brought -- and I'm not going to
2 have a time to give you exact numbers of what the
3 level is. That's because of the flooding out to the
4 west. So we accommodate people off to the west of
5 us and their issues, and we become the sacrifice
6 zone.

7 MR. MILBURN: Okay.

8 MR. MYERS: So I'm -- I'm against reducing
9 the power generation at the dams.

10 MR. MILBURN: Thank you.

11 MS. BUZDYGON: May -- may I interrupt real
12 quick?

13 MR. MILBURN: You bet.

14 MS. BUZDYGON: Sorry, Chair Milburn.
15 We're just going to have someone from the hotel
16 check the mics and see if we can get the sound up a
17 little bit louder.

18 (WHEREUPON, a recess was taken.)

19 MR. MILBURN: All right. So how about
20 Matt, Matt Boyer. Thanks for coming, Matt.

21 MR. BOYER: Thank you. My name is Matt
22 Boyer. I work with Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
23 in the hydropower mitigation programs at Libby and
24 Hungry Horse Dams. Thank you, Chair Milburn and the
25 Council for your focus and work to date on the 2026

1 Fish and Wildlife Program. This is no small
2 undertaking in a basin as socially and biologically
3 diverse as the Columbia.

4 Back in May, Fish, Wildlife & Parks
5 submitted written comments on the Draft Program, and
6 a central focus of these recommendations was on
7 maintaining support for operations at Libby and
8 Hungry Horse that over the years have been developed
9 collaboratively with Shish and Kootenai Tribes and
10 Kootenai Tribe of Idaho.

11 With continued support from the federal
12 action agencies, these Montana operations as we call
13 them balance hydropower generation, flood risk
14 management, and ecosystem function. Support
15 resident fish but also anadromous species downriver
16 in the basin through well-timed flow augmentation.
17 We appreciate the Council's inclusion of this
18 recommendation in the Draft Program.

19 Another area of focus in our comments was
20 continued emphasis on directing mitigation actions
21 on the ground in strongholds within the Columbia
22 Basin. By strongholds, I mean areas projected to
23 retain cold water in the future, and in the case of
24 the Flathead and Kootenai sub-basins here locally,
25 these strongholds contain large areas of protected

1 and public land offered from the development and
2 other threats to these mitigation investments.

3 With support from the Council and in
4 collaboration with Bonneville and other partners,
5 Libby and Hungry Horse mitigation programs have made
6 important strides working in such strongholds to
7 achieve sustainable conservation outcomes from
8 resident fish species affected by the hydro system.

9 Montana thanks the Council for its
10 leadership role in Columbia Basin conservation, and
11 we value our longstanding collaboration to advance
12 resident fish and habitat mitigation. Thank you.

13 MR. MILBURN: Thank you. And thank you,
14 Matt.

15 All right. Jason Williams?

16 MR. WILLIAMS: Hello. I'm Jason Williams.
17 I am the Chief Operating Officer for Flathead
18 Electric.

19 Chair Milburn, Council Member Grob, thank
20 you for the opportunity to testify tonight.
21 Flathead Electric is a nonprofit-member-owned
22 utility serving more than 77,000 meters across
23 Northwest Montana. As Chief Operating Officer, it
24 is my responsibility to ensure we can deliver
25 electricity reliably and affordability, particularly

1 during periods of high demand and extreme
2 conditions.

3 From an operational standpoint,
4 reliability is our primary concern because of how
5 directly people depend on electricity in our service
6 territory. In Northwest Montana, power is essential
7 for home heating during long winter cold spells, for
8 medical equipment in homes, for water and wastewater
9 systems, and for emergency and communication
10 services.

11 When the system is under stress, the
12 consequences of outages can escalate quickly. We
13 saw that firsthand in January of 2024 when our
14 region experienced prolonged record-breaking cold
15 temperatures. Electricity demand increased sharply
16 as members relied on powers to heat their home and
17 maintain essential services. During that event, the
18 regional power system was extremely tight. Grid
19 operators took extraordinary measures to maintain
20 reliability, and the Northwest came close to
21 controlled outages.

22 During that period, reliability was
23 maintained through a combination of operational
24 flexibility within the hydropower system and large
25 volumes of emergency power imports from the market,

1 often at a very high cost. The ability to respond
2 quickly and maximize the flexibility of the federal
3 hydro system was essential to meeting demand in real
4 time.

5 Events like that how narrow system margins
6 have become during extreme conditions. Importantly,
7 planning forecasts need these reliability risks --
8 or indicate, sorry, indicate these reliability risks
9 will occur more often. Not just during extreme
10 weather, but as regional electricity demand grows
11 rapidly, and existing system margins continue to
12 narrow.

13 Affordability is closely tied to those
14 same dynamics. Our members already experience
15 significant seasonal swings in energy costs. The
16 average Flathead Electric residential bill during
17 non-heating months is about \$100 per month. During
18 cold weather, bills increase substantially.

19 During one recent cold snap, average
20 residential bills rose by roughly 80 percent. That
21 figure actually understates the total energy cost
22 impact for many area households since heating costs
23 appear on different utility bills for roughly half
24 our service area that is heated by natural gas.

25 For many households, those increases are

1 difficult to manage. During the '24, '25 heating
2 period, Flathead Electric Cooperative worked
3 aggressively to keep the power on for nearly 2,000
4 households in our area using every available tool
5 including bill assistance, service charge waivers,
6 and coordination with federal and community programs
7 to administer more than 1.1 million in combined
8 support to our residential members.

9 This is part of the operational reality of
10 serving rural Montana through extreme winter
11 conditions, and it underscores how little margin
12 exists for the additional system stress. When
13 system changes reduce operational flexibility or
14 increase reliance on expensive, emergency power,
15 those impacts are felt quickly in rural communities
16 like ours. They show up in higher bills and
17 increased strain during periods of peak demand.

18 As the Council considers the Draft Fish
19 and Wildlife Program, we encourage careful
20 consideration on how proposed measures affect system
21 reliability and affordability, particularly during
22 peak and emergency conditions. Maintaining
23 flexibility remains an important part of managing
24 risk under increasingly challenging system
25 conditions.

1 Thank you for your time and consideration.

2 MR. MILBURN: Thank you.

3 All right. Chris Sidmore?

4 Thank you, Chris.

5 MR. SIDMORE: All right. My name is Chris
6 Sidmore, and I serve as the Director of the Flathead
7 Food Bank. Thank you for having me.

8 I want to begin by saying I'm not here as
9 an expert in hydropower or fisheries. I'm here as
10 someone who works every day with families who are
11 already on the financial edge. My role in this
12 conversation is to represent those people whose
13 voices are rarely present in rooms like this.

14 Now, in many parts of the world, people
15 seek help from a nonprofit or N.G.O. because of a
16 catastrophic event. Think a flood, a storm, a
17 failed harvest. But here in the United States,
18 that's actually usually not the case. Normally what
19 drives to people to the -- to our door is that the
20 food bank is the slow squeeze of the cost of living.

21 Rent goes up, gas goes up, groceries go
22 up, medical bills pile up, and when utility costs
23 rise, families are forced to make an impossible
24 choice. At the Flathead Food Bank, we now see over
25 2,000 visits to our pantry every month. In total,

1 our program served just under 80,000 people
2 annually. These are working families, seniors,
3 single parents, and people doing their best in a
4 very tough economy.

5 We recently conducted a client survey to
6 understand what is driving food insecurity in the
7 Flathead Valley. There are many other statistics I
8 could share today that directly connect to rising
9 costs -- utility costs and costs of living pressure
10 to the families we see at the food bank. But keep
11 -- in order to keep this message clear, I'd like to
12 share one.

13 Nearly one-third of our clients cited high
14 energy costs as a major strain, and many households
15 already report falling behind on utility bills.
16 Please remember that these are not abstract
17 statistics. These are our neighbors. These are
18 single moms working full time trying to pay an
19 \$1,800 a month apartment bill on a \$17 an hour wage.
20 Parents choosing between filling the gas tanks to
21 get to work or buying winter coats. Seniors
22 deciding whether to refill a prescription or buy
23 groceries.

24 For many people, things here are already
25 very tough. I respect the importance of protecting

1 our natural resources, and I definitely believe we
2 should continue that work. But I can tell you for
3 certain, if electricity prices rise, we will see
4 more families coming to the food bank.

5 There is also another piece you many may
6 not realize. At the food bank, we store and
7 distribute a large amount of perishable food. We
8 currently do not have a backup generator for
9 refrigeration. Reliable power is essential not only
10 for the families we serve, but for our ability to
11 safely serve them at all. If power went out for an
12 extended period of time, we'd be in a lot of
13 trouble.

14 So today my request is simple. I know
15 these decisions are complex. I know there are
16 competing priorities. But as you weigh fish and
17 wildlife goals with power system operations, please
18 remember the families who have no financial cushion.
19 The families who cannot absorb higher bills. The
20 families who will feel these impacts first.

21 Please continue to protect the rivers, but
22 please also protect the people who live beside them.
23 Thank you for your time and your consideration.

24 MR. MILBURN: Yeah. Thank you, Chris, for
25 coming and for what you do.

1 MR. SIDMORE: Thank you.

2 MR. MILBURN: Lorraine?

3 Thank you, Lorraine.

4 MS. CLARNO: Yes. Chair Milburn, members
5 of the Council, thank you for the opportunity to be
6 here today and to share a few words. My name is
7 Lorraine Clarno. I serve as President and CEO of
8 the Kalispell Chamber of Commerce. And in that
9 role, I'm here today speaking on behalf of our
10 membership, which is a little over 680 local
11 businesses and employers that also represent a
12 little over 20,000 employees here in the Flathead
13 Valley.

14 Our business community strongly values
15 natural resources that define our region, and we
16 understand the importance of protecting fish and
17 wildlife. At the same time, affordable and reliable
18 electricity is the foundation to economic stability,
19 particularly in rural communities like ours.

20 As we've reviewed the Draft Fish and
21 Wildlife Program, we're concerned about the
22 operational direction it sets for the long term in
23 the hydropower system. The Draft appears to further
24 constrain how the system can be operated, especially
25 during those peak times when loads are the heaviest

1 and market prices are also the highest.

2 From a business perspective, those
3 operational constraints matter. When hydropower
4 systems have less flexibility, it reduces access to
5 the region's lowest cost, most reliable source of
6 electricity, and increases reliance on higher cost
7 alternatives. Those higher system costs, ultimately
8 no surprise, flow to the employers and then to the
9 customers.

10 Local businesses already are facing rising
11 costs for labor, insurance, materials, financing.
12 Inflation is certainly real. Electricity is not a
13 discretionary expense, you heard from Paul McKenzie.
14 We need electricity to operate our businesses, and
15 we really need limited ability when it comes to
16 reducing that usage.

17 When power costs increase, businesses are
18 forced to raise prices, delay investments, even
19 limit job creation and hiring, all of which affects
20 our local economic growth. Reliability is equally
21 critical. Many businesses in our region, Logan
22 Health, for example, food processing, storage,
23 manufacturing, and our tourism related operations
24 depend on the hydropower system's ability to respond
25 during cold snaps, heat waves, and peak demand

1 periods. Operational changes that reduce the system
2 flexibility introduce risk at exactly the same time
3 when electricity is the most essential to
4 operations.

5 Federal law directs this Council to
6 balance fish and wildlife protections with
7 affordability, reliability, and economic impacts.
8 From the business community's perspective, that
9 balance is certainly essential. We're concerned
10 that the operational approach outlined in the draft
11 plan may tip that balance a little too far,
12 particular at a time when energy and affordability
13 is already a major concern for employers and
14 households across the Northwest Montana Region.

15 In a rural economy like ours where
16 businesses already face these higher costs and fewer
17 alternatives, electricity, affordability, and
18 reliability are not abstract policy considerations.
19 In many cases, they're make or break factors to
20 staying open, expanding, and continuing to provide
21 jobs for our residents.

22 We respectfully urge the Council to
23 carefully consider the economic reliability impacts
24 of the proposed operational changes as you move
25 forward towards the final plan, and ensure that the

1 region's power system remains affordable, reliable,
2 and supportive for a strong local economy.

3 Thank you very much for your time today.

4 MR. MILBURN: And thank you, Lorraine.

5 Okay. Next is Mark Johnson.

6 MR. JOHNSON: All right. Good evening,
7 Chair Milburn and Council Member Grob. My name is
8 Mark Johnson. I serve as the CEO and General
9 Manager of Flathead Electric Cooperative. As CEO
10 and General Manager, I'm responsible for ensuring
11 that we provide safe, reliable, and affordable
12 electric service to our members while also being
13 responsible stewards of the natural resources that
14 define our region.

15 Flathead Electric supports science-based
16 efforts to protect fish and wildlife, and we
17 recognize the work that has gone into developing the
18 Draft Fish and Wildlife Program. My comments focus
19 on the statutory framework that governs this
20 program, and why adherence to the framework is
21 particularly important given current regional system
22 conditions.

23 The Northwest Power Act directs the
24 Council to develop a regional power plan that
25 assures that the Pacific Northwest an adequate,

1 efficient, economical, and reliable power system.
2 The Act also requires that the Fish and Wildlife
3 Program be developed as an integrated and consistent
4 component of that power plan. These are not
5 separate mandates.

6 Fish and wildlife measures must be
7 evaluated in light of their cost, reliability, and
8 system impacts as part of a single, coordinated
9 regional approach. As we review the draft program,
10 we are concerned that certain hydropower operations
11 concepts appear to move beyond that integrated
12 framework. Several of the proposed measures share
13 key characteristics with operational proposals
14 advanced through ongoing federal litigation and
15 evaluated by the Bonneville Power Administration.

16 Given that many of these concepts overlap
17 directly with BPA's statutory responsibilities for
18 operating the federal hydropower system, continued
19 coordination with BPA and other federal agencies
20 will be critical to avoid duplicative or conflicting
21 policy direction.

22 BPA has cautioned that these types of
23 constraints will likely materially increase system
24 costs and elevate reliability risks, particularly
25 during peak and emergency conditions. This raises

1 an important issue of risk asymmetry. The
2 reliability and affordability impacts associated
3 with additional hydropower constraints would be
4 immediate and of high consequence.

5 By contrast, the incremental biological
6 benefits of those constraints have not been clearly
7 quantified, nor publicly demonstrated. When
8 potential impacts are this significant, the
9 Council's obligation to weigh tradeoffs carefully
10 and transparently is especially critical.

11 Recent experience across the region has
12 demonstrated how narrow reliability margins have
13 become. During periods of extreme weather and
14 system stress, operational flexibility, particularly
15 within the hydropower system has been essential to
16 maintaining grid stability. Measures that reduce
17 that flexibility increase exposure to extended
18 outages and emergency conditions with direct
19 consequences for the communities we serve.

20 As the Council considers revisions to the
21 Draft Program, we respectfully urge you to ensure
22 that recommended actions are demonstrably effective,
23 fully consistent with the Power Plan, and supported
24 by a transparent assessment of cost and reliability
25 impacts as required by the Northwest Power Act.

1 Thank you for the opportunity to provide
2 comment.

3 MR. MILBURN: And thank you, Mark.

4 Okay. How about Kyle. Is it Kyle Cram?
5 Yep. Kyle, thanks for coming.

6 MR. CRAM: Thank you. Thank you, Chair
7 Milburn and the Council members for the opportunity
8 to comment today. My name is Kyle Cram, and I serve
9 as the plant manager of our Columbia Falls MDF Plant
10 for Weyerhaeuser.

11 We are the largest consumer of electricity
12 in Northwest Montana and employ over 500 Montanans
13 in our three wood processing facilities.
14 Weyerhaeuser values natural resources that make
15 Montana a special place, and we also depend on
16 healthy forests to provide wood fiber to feed our
17 mills.

18 At the same time, affordability and
19 reliable electricity is the foundation to our
20 ability to operate in Northwest Montana. After
21 reviewing the Draft Fish and Wildlife Program, we do
22 have concerns that the operational direction it
23 establishes for federal hydropower systems will
24 negatively impact operations, particularly during
25 high periods of electricity demand and elevated

1 market prices.

2 Reduced operation -- operational
3 flexibility has cost implications for industrial
4 customers such as Weyerhaeuser. When the hydropower
5 system is constrained, access to our region's lowest
6 cost and most reliable source of electricity is
7 reduced. This increase -- that increases our
8 reliance on higher cost generation. This increased
9 cost -- system cost ultimately translates into
10 higher operating costs for our facilities.

11 The wood products industry is currently
12 experiencing higher costs across labor, insurance,
13 materials and financing, and electricity is a
14 necessary input in our wood processing facilities,
15 which we have limited ability to reduce consumption.

16 Our mills in Montana compete within --
17 within Weyerhaeuser with other mills for capital
18 investments. And increased costs like those would
19 cause -- constrained by hydropower would hamper our
20 ability to compete for company investments. Over
21 time, that limits our efficiency and ability to
22 increase workforce level. It also increases our
23 product prices, making it harder to compete in the
24 broader market.

25 System reliability is also a key

1 consideration. Hydropower plays an important role,
2 meeting our electricity needs during wide ranges of
3 weather events including extreme cold, storms, and
4 heat events. Changes that reduce that flexibility
5 such as those contemplated by the Draft Fish and
6 Wildlife Plan will increase our risk -- our risk to
7 output, to our workforce during those periods when
8 reliable electricity is most critical.

9 As the largest consumer of electricity in
10 Northwest Montana, and one of the largest employers,
11 Weyerhaeuser feels that maintaining this balance is
12 crucial. We are concerned that the operational
13 approach outlined in the Draft Plan does not
14 adequately achieve this balance, especially in the
15 light of our current challenges related to energy
16 affordability.

17 We encourage the Council to carefully
18 consider the economic and reliability impacts,
19 proposed operational changes as you develop the
20 final program. It's critically important to
21 Weyerhaeuser and our workforce that the region's
22 power systems remain affordable, reliable, and
23 supportive of our local communities.

24 Thank you for considering this comment.

25 MR. MILBURN: Thank you, Kyle.

1 Okay. We have Kate -- is it Katie
2 Pfennigs; is that right?

3 MS. PFENNIGS: Good evening, Chair
4 Milburn.

5 MR. MILBURN: Good evening.

6 MS. PFENNIGS: And Member Grob. Thank you
7 for the opportunity to be here. My name is Katie
8 Pfennigs. I serve as the Community Relations
9 Manager at Flathead Electric Cooperative.

10 Flathead Electric supports meaningful and
11 science-based efforts to improve fish and wildlife
12 outcomes across the Columbia River Basin. Our
13 members care deeply about these ecosystems. Many of
14 them live, work, and recreate along the rivers that
15 this program is designed to protect, and they want
16 conservation efforts to succeed in ways that are
17 effective and targeted and grounded in sound
18 science.

19 From our prospective, the key question is
20 not whether to pursue fish and wildlife recovery,
21 but how to do so in a way that delivers measurable
22 biological benefits without introducing unnecessary
23 reliability and affordability risk for the
24 communities we serve.

25 There are clear examples of actions that

1 meet that standard. Targeted investments in
2 predator management, fish passage improvements,
3 habitat restoration, and reintroduction programs
4 focused directly on limiting factors that affect
5 survival and allow for monitoring adaptive
6 management and accountability over time.

7 There are also strong examples of
8 collaborative, science-based efforts that are
9 already delivering progress, building on decades of
10 prior mitigation, recovery, and operational
11 investments. Industry partners, tribal nations, and
12 federal agencies are working together to reintroduce
13 salmon to the upper Columbia River Basin where fish
14 have been blocked for decades. That effort is
15 already producing measurable results, including the
16 return of adult salmon to the upper river.

17 This partnership-driven approach
18 demonstrates how fish recovery can advance through
19 targeted actions without reducing hydropower system
20 flexibility. That approach is also consistent with
21 the best available science, which shows that salmon
22 survival is influenced by a wide range of factors
23 across their life cycle, many of which can be
24 addressed through targeted actions that do not
25 require broad operational constraints on the

1 hydropower system.

2 By contrast, systemwide operational
3 constraints on hydropower are blunt tools. They
4 reduce flexibility across the power system
5 regardless of conditions and do so without clear
6 evidence that the incremental biological benefits
7 justify the associated reliability and cost risks.
8 Those risks are not abstract. They're born by the
9 households, small businesses, and essential services
10 during peak -- periods of peak demand and emergency
11 conditions.

12 Operational flexibility is what allows the
13 power system to respond to rapidly changing
14 circumstances: Extreme cold, unexpected outages, or
15 sudden shifts in load. Preserving that flexibility
16 is especially important during a period of
17 unprecedented load growth, increasing weather
18 volatility, and long timelines for new resource
19 development.

20 Reducing flexibility before durable
21 alternatives are in place increases exposure to
22 these high-consequence events. The Fish and
23 Wildlife Program can advance ecological goals while
24 remaining grounded in operational reality.
25 Prioritizing actions with demonstrated biological

1 benefits, lower system risk, and clear performance
2 measures provides a practical path forward that
3 supports both fish recovery and electric
4 reliability.

5 As the Council moves toward finalizing the
6 program, we respectfully encourage continued
7 collaboration with utilities and system operators,
8 transparent evaluation of tradeoffs, and careful
9 selection of measures that improve fish survival
10 without materially undermining system reliance.

11 Thank you so much for your time and for
12 your consideration.

13 MR. MILBURN: Yes, Katie. Thank you.
14 Thank you for coming.

15 And we have what -- is it Pady? Is that
16 like Paddy? Okay. Thank you. You're next.

17 MS. DUSING: Dear Northwest Power and
18 Conservation Council Members, my name is Pady
19 Dusing, and I reside in Kalispell. My electric
20 company is Flathead Electric.

21 I am deeply concerned about the crisis
22 salmon and steelhead are facing across the Columbia
23 Basin, and Bonneville Power Administration's attempt
24 to abandon its obligations to help recover and
25 rebuilt imperiled salmon populations. Salmon,

1 orcas, and tribes needs a restored Columbia Basin
2 and free flowing lower Snake River.

3 Now is the time for a solution. I
4 strongly urge you to uphold the interim goal of 5
5 million adult salmon and steelhead returning
6 annually. All measures and actions implemented in
7 the 2026 Fish and Wildlife Program must be designed
8 to meet this goal.

9 This includes a plan for elevated levels
10 of spill through August 31st annually. Must include
11 the full range of accountable measures to ensure all
12 parties including Bonneville Power fully embrace and
13 honor its obligation to protect and enhance all
14 fisheries impacted by the hydro system. And lastly,
15 the plan should acknowledge Lower Snake River Dam
16 removal.

17 Established science clearly demonstrates
18 that removing the dams is a necessary action to
19 achieve the Council's 5 million fish goal and will
20 have the single largest impact on the recovery of
21 salmon and steelhead populations. The future will
22 be determined by your action or inaction. Support a
23 free-flowing Lower Snake River so your children and
24 your grandchildren will know a future that has a
25 robust salmon population in it.

1 Thank you for providing this opportunity
2 to speak about this urgent and important matter.

3 MR. MILBURN: Pady, thank you.

4 MS. DUSING: Thank you.

5 MR. MILBURN: All right. Next is Joe
6 Kolman. Thank you for coming, Joe, and
7 congratulations on your new job.

8 MR. KOLMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman,
9 Councilman Grob. This is the first time I've been
10 on this side of the table from you, Mr. Chairman. I
11 appreciate it.

12 My name is Joe Kolman. That's, J-O-E, K-
13 O-L-M-A-N, and I'm testifying today on behalf of the
14 Montana Electric Cooperatives Association.

15 MECA, as its known, represents 25 co-ops
16 across the State of Montana serving about 400,000
17 Montanans, so almost half of the entire state relies
18 on co-ops for their energy. 8 of those co-ops are
19 on this side of the divide, and they rely directly
20 on BPA and that power.

21 You know, for your consideration today,
22 it's important to note that those rapairs have paid
23 a lot for the operation already of the dams and also
24 the fish and wildlife mitigation that's been done to
25 date. You heard some really good testimony, I

1 think, from very specific people in the community,
2 the food bank, the lumber mills, some other -- some
3 other businesses that are affected by the decisions
4 you're going to make here.

5 So I think I'm going to back up a little
6 bit and just acknowledge you a really hard job. I
7 don't think anyone would disagree with that. Your
8 balancing power versus fish and wildlife, people's
9 lives, tradition, culture, all of those things.
10 That's a hard job, and we appreciate you stepping up
11 to do it. We also appreciate the -- the
12 recommendations that we made in July seemed to have
13 made at least some impact on the Draft. So I am
14 going to touch on some pretty specific things that
15 are in the Draft right now that we would urge you to
16 do.

17 First, we would urge you to modernize the
18 recovery objectives using the best available
19 science, continue support for the Montana operations
20 that ensure storage reservoirs operate with
21 consideration to power generation and fish health.

22 This one is super specific: Revise the
23 mitigation strategy measure listed on page 44. The
24 way it reads now, it says, "Prioritize operations
25 and dam modifications that produce the flow,

1 passage, and habitat conditions that best fit the
2 natural behavior patterns of fish." We think you
3 should resist efforts to maximize spill and the
4 expensive power generation.

5 There is data out there that indicates the
6 survival risk for fish utilizing the powerhouse root
7 is 90 to 98 percent. Fish operations are working.
8 So we would -- we would suggest that those -- that
9 sentence be revised to say, "Prioritize operations
10 and dam modifications that best balance the flow of
11 passage and habitat conditions beneficial to native
12 fish with flow necessary for power generation."

13 Along those lines, recognize the billions
14 of dollars that have been invested in salmon and
15 steelhead recovery already. Things that are
16 working, things that are showing progress toward
17 that. Reduce proposals that would reduce
18 hydroelectric available and increase costs. Of
19 course this includes breaching of the Snake River
20 Dams, but anything else that would negatively affect
21 power supply and drive up costs.

22 I would point out as another aside, the
23 Snake River Dams and the things that you do don't
24 just matter on this side of the divide. Rural
25 Montana, which is MECA's statewide magazine which

1 goes to the other side of the divide as well,
2 produced a four-part series on the -- on the Snake
3 River Dams, and there's a link in my testimony. But
4 that goes out to 133,000 subscribers statewide.
5 There is a lot of interest all over the state in
6 what you do and the decisions you make today.

7 Another thing along those lines, is
8 pursuit predator control is the most cost-effective
9 way to lose fish returns. Predator control is -- is
10 going to be a lot easier and a lot easier to manage
11 than doing a lot of operational things. At -- at
12 the very least, prioritize that.

13 Lastly, we applaud the -- we applaud the
14 parts of the Draft that talk about pursuing outside
15 funding through the whole of government approach.
16 We would point out that that is certainly a positive
17 aspiration, however knowing that it is an
18 aspiration, we would consider you to adopt a -- an
19 adaptable program structures to provide at least
20 some assurances that if that funding doesn't come
21 through, if Congress and those other -- other
22 agencies don't -- don't fork over some money, that
23 those costs aren't inadvertently passed on to our
24 rapairs.

25 With that we -- I think we outlined. We

1 urge you to move forward with extreme caution and
2 understanding the balance that you have to -- to
3 reach and -- and understanding that this carbon free
4 electricity powers our communities and affects
5 people all the way from the food bank to the North
6 Dakota line. Mr. Chairman.

7 MR. MILBURN: Joe, thank you. Thanks for
8 coming.

9 All right. We have Lynn. Yeah. Lynn,
10 thanks. Good to see you.

11 MS. DUCHARME: Good to see you too. Good
12 afternoon, Mr. Chair and Member Grob. My name is
13 Lynn Ducharme, and I am representing the
14 Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes today. We
15 would like to thank you for the opportunity to come
16 in on the Draft 2026 Fish and Wildlife Program.

17 The people of the Confederated Salish and
18 Kootenai Tribes have lived in the mountains and
19 valleys of the upper Columbia and upper Missouri
20 since time and memorial. Through the Hellgate
21 Treaty and the CSKT Constitution, CSKT's retained
22 unique rights in the water and waterways in our
23 original homelands.

24 CSKT is consulted directly and indirectly
25 on the Columbia Basin fish and wildlife issues

1 throughout their entire history. The Tribes have
2 participated in the Columbia Basin Fish and Wildlife
3 Program for over 30 years. During that time, we
4 have developed experience and familiarity, not only
5 with the Council's program, but also with fish and
6 wildlife mitigation actions needed to mitigate the
7 impacts and losses resulting from Hungry Horse and
8 Libby Dams.

9 The Tribes and Montana Fish, Wildlife and
10 Parks have made tremendous strides protecting
11 habitat, reducing non-native species, and doing many
12 other mitigation activities that promote the
13 persistence of native fish in the Flathead Basin all
14 with your help and support. We commend the Council
15 for continuing to support resident fish mitigation
16 efforts.

17 We appreciate the Council and your staff
18 for their continuous support of the Montana --
19 Montana operations, and our efforts to effectively
20 mitigate for losses in the basin through both
21 habitat and non native species management. With the
22 new Draft Program, we would also like to thank you
23 for building in some flexibility and meeting the
24 obligation to mitigate for the 448 kilometers of
25 habitat blocked and inundated behind Hungry Horse

1 Dam.

2 Other than that, keep up the good work,
3 and, again, thank you.

4 MR. MILBURN: Yes. And Lynn, thank you.

5 Alan Ruby. Welcome, Alan.

6 MR. RUBY: Thank you. I came up a little
7 quicker than I expected. But my name is Alan Ruby.
8 I serve on the Board of Trustees of Flathead
9 Electric Co-op as Doug Grob, our colleague, did for
10 many years with me. I apologize for being here a
11 little late and not as well prepared as I could have
12 been, but I think others have maybe said what I want
13 to say.

14 We appreciate all the work. We
15 desperately don't want to lose any sources of power
16 that we already have for our members that rely on us
17 to provide that -- that affordable, reliable power.
18 And I know you do the best you can amidst all the
19 other struggles and the uncertainty of the world.
20 So I encourage to continue to think of the small
21 people, the widows that live around me, the small
22 kids such as my grandkids that need your help to
23 live an affordable life. Thank you.

24 MR. MILBURN: Well, thank you.

25 All right. I don't have anyone else on

1 the list to testify. I -- I do appreciate everyone
2 for what you have -- what you have had to say. It's
3 very -- it's been very worthwhile, and -- and also
4 for your consideration in keeping it short, concise,
5 and all of that, and your consideration towards each
6 other on this.

7 So we're trying to keep it standardized
8 throughout the four states on allowing, you know,
9 adequate time for everyone but equal and fair.
10 We're going to take a short break, and I'll go
11 around to see if anybody has any special
12 considerations or testimony and we'll wait around to
13 see who else shows up. So let's go into recess.
14 Thanks.

15 (WHEREUPON, a recess was taken.)

16 MR. MILBURN: We'll bring the meeting back
17 to order again for a couple minutes. We'll give
18 McGregor a couple more minutes to finish up, and
19 then if nobody shows up for -- or for testimony,
20 nobody new, we'll go back into recess until 6:00.

21 All right. Everyone. Everyone.

22 All right. McGregor?

23 MR. RHODES: Yeah. I'm McGregor Rhodes
24 speaking again. I just got a few points I missed.
25 Just so everybody knows, the Canadian government has

1 the right to divert 20 percent of the Kootenai River
2 at Canal Flats in part of the Columbia River Treaty.
3 If they ever decided to exercise that right, they
4 would take 20 percent of the water from Kootenai
5 River at Canal Flats and send it directly into the
6 Columbia bypassing Libby Dam.

7 That was always a big economic thing we
8 talked about in our lawsuits. 20 percent is a lot
9 of power, a lot of water. It makes a big
10 difference. The treaty's been renegotiated, but I
11 don't think it's been approved by the senate yet.
12 But the -- the -- the Canadian diversion is still in
13 the treaty as far as I know.

14 Okay. The freshwater fishery associated
15 with the Kootenai Lake, that means the Kootenai and
16 the -- the -- the rivers in Canada that were dammed
17 by the treaty dams, there are four treaty dams,
18 before those dams were built, the freshwater fishery
19 associated the Kootenai Lake was the most productive
20 fishery in North America until those dams were
21 built, and now that's ancient history.

22 MR. GROB: You're talking BC there,
23 British Columbia.

24 MR. RHODES: Oh. The three dams in
25 British Columbia, and the one dam, Libby. Yeah.

1 They destroyed the freshwater fishery associated
2 with the Kootenai Lake. Gone. I mean, there's --
3 there's fishing now, but it's not like it was.

4 I want to remind everyone, too, that the
5 Kootenai Falls came within about this far of being
6 dammed. It was only a massive effort by my club and
7 the Montana Wildlife Federation and the Confederated
8 Kootenai Tribe that stopped the dam at Kootenai
9 Falls. That was a dam sponsored by seven rural
10 electric co-ops. They was sold a bill of goods by
11 the developer.

12 And -- and -- and that went through the
13 Federal Energy Regulatory Commission and the Montana
14 Major Facility Siting Act. Both those agencies
15 presented huge environmental -- environmental impact
16 statements, and the dam was denied by both of those
17 agencies for -- for various reasons.

18 And my last point is it's brought to my
19 attention that the Corps of Engineers wants to put a
20 sixth power unit into the Libby Dam, and that's
21 totally illogical. There's only so much water in
22 the river. Putting more generators and turbines in
23 will not create any more electricity. I don't know
24 they got that through, but I think someone should
25 look into this and ask that a cost-benefit study be

1 done on the sixth generator, because the money can
2 be put to use improving efficiency and in
3 conservation programs like the Council wants to do.

4 The Corps does these things kind of in the
5 -- in the shadows. They don't let anybody know.
6 They kind of think that they're in charge of
7 everything. But that sixth unit, the information I
8 provided you, it's not in there, but I'm -- I'm
9 making a point now. The sixth unit should be
10 investigated. There's no reason for it.

11 The Kootenai River only has enough water
12 to run two turbines on a 24/7 basis. They used the
13 fourth for semi-peaking, the fifth was kind of an
14 addition that we negotiated into the settlement when
15 we all -- when we stopped the rerigged dam and tried
16 to finish all this out.

17 And so anyway, the sixth unit is bad. And
18 even -- even after the rerigged was done, Seattle
19 City and Light applied to the FERC to build the
20 Libby rerigged dam. Nobody knows that. And we
21 stopped them in their tracks. They didn't even --
22 they didn't even apply. They put a notice of
23 application in, and the backlash was so intense that
24 they stopped that.

25 So I'd just to thank the Council for being

1 here and putting up with my efforts and thank you
2 both for just listening to me.

3 MR. MILBURN: Yeah. Yeah. Well, thank
4 you. Very interesting. Thank for what you do. And
5 -- and also thank you for the handouts and
6 information.

7 MR. RHODES: You're welcome. Okay. Thank
8 you.

9 MR. MILBURN: Okay. Let's go back into
10 recess. We'll go back into recess, we'll wait a few
11 minutes.

12 MR. GROB: Yeah. You can say we'll be
13 here until 6:00 --

14 MR. MILBURN: Yeah. We'll be here until
15 6:00.

16 MR. GROB: So we can go in recess until
17 someone shows up.

18 MR. MILBURN: That's right. We will.

19 (WHEREUPON, the PUBLIC HEARING, concluded
20 at 5:28 p.m.)
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22
23
24
25

CERTIFICATE

I, Jacqueline Barretta, do hereby certify that I reported all proceedings adduced in the foregoing matter and that the foregoing transcript pages constitutes a full, true and accurate record of said proceedings to the best of my ability.

I further certify that I am neither related to counsel or any party to the proceedings nor have any interest in the outcome of the proceedings.

IN WITNESS HEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this 18th day of February, 2026.



Jacqueline Barretta

Certificate No. 24026958

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