

# Farmers offer comments on Columbia-Snake River System

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Matthew Weaver/Capital Press McGregor Co. CEO Alex McGregor, Colfax, Wash., rancher Tom Kammerzell and Davenport, Wash., farmer Garry Rosman submit written comments about the Columbia River system Nov. 14 during a scoping meeting in Spokane.

Some wrote by hand. Others wrote on a computer. Some had other people write it down word-for-word.

Still others will send an email or a letter outlining their thoughts on the Columbia-Snake River System.

The public has many options to tell the federal government about the river system, and all of them were on display in Spokane during one of 15 scoping meetings to help the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and Bonneville Power Administration collect comments for an environmental impact statement on the dams.

“We’re asking the public to come in and look at what we’ve outlined, which is how we currently operate, and say, ‘Does this look right?’” said Rebecca Weiss, program coordinator for the corps. “Is there something else that we’re missing in the system that’s important to you that you want us to look at?”

The meeting drew farmers and ranchers, as well as critics of the river system and its dams.

The dams are on track to achieve 96 percent average dam survival for young spring chinook and steelhead and 93 percent for young summer-migrating fish, according to the BPA.

The river system has the most fish since Bonneville Dam was built in the 1930s, according to the Pacific Northwest Waterways Association. In 2014, more than 2.5 million adult salmon and steelhead passed the dam, setting new overall record levels since counts began in 1938. The sockeye, fall chinook and coho posted record or near-record runs, including Snake River stocks. The dams on the Snake River do not block access for fish.

Paul Gross, farmer with the Spokane Hutterians in Reardan, Wash., wanted to know more about water control for three pump sites on the Spokane River.

“Any time they change the elevation, it affects us,” Gross said. “The price of wheat is half of what it was two years ago. We’re already below the cost of production, so any time you make it harder for me, I’m just going to go broke faster.”

It’s important for farmers and ranchers to contribute comments, said Colfax, Wash., rancher Tom Kammerzell, a commissioner for the Whitman County port district.

“This is up close and intimate to everybody in this region, and affects us more than anybody,” Kammerzell said. “You can make a decision, but you can’t make it without all the facts, not the cherry-picked facts.”

Deadline to comment is Jan. 17. Two webinars will be offered at 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. Pacific Time Dec. 13 on the project website.

Following are the remaining meetings:

- Nov 21: Holiday Inn Express & Suites, Pasco-Tri Cities, 4525 Convention Place, Pasco, Wash. 4-7 p.m.
- Nov. 29: The Grove Hotel, 245 S. Capitol Blvd., Boise, Idaho. 4-7 p.m.
- Dec. 1: Town Hall Great Room, 1119 8th Ave., Seattle, Wash. 4-7 p.m.
- Dec. 6: The Columbia Gorge Discovery Center, River Gallery Room, 5000 Discovery Drive, The Dalles, Ore. 4-7 p.m.
- Dec. 7: Oregon Convention Center, 777 NE Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd., Portland. 4-7 p.m.
- Dec. 8: The Loft at the Red Building, 20 Basin St., Astoria, Ore. 4-7 p.m.

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