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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

FEDERAL AGENCIES BREAK THE LAW: DAMS CREATE LETHALLY HOT WATER AND FISH KILLS

July 31, 2015 (Boise, ID; Portland OR; and Seattle, WA) — Federal dam operators are breaking the law by allowing the Columbia River to reach lethally hot temperatures for salmon. Scientists report that 400,000 sockeye, 80 percent of the run, are dead or dying. Fishermen and conservation groups are calling on the Obama Administration to take action to stop the extreme river heat.

“It’s unacceptable to break the law and kill almost half a million salmon with temperature pollution,” stated Brett VandenHeuvel, Executive Director for Columbia Riverkeeper. “We need to modify dam operations to restore more natural flows, and remove obsolete dams.”

The Clean Water Act bans Columbia River temperatures over 68 degrees Fahrenheit. When water temperatures reach the 70s, salmon die. In 2003 the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency conducted a study to understand the root causes of hot water pollution in the Columbia and Snake rivers and began developing a legally enforceable plan to fix the problem. But dam operators objected and the plan was shelved. Why? Federal scientists concluded that dams are the dominant pollution problem.

“This summer’s salmon catastrophe was entirely predictable and preventable,” stated Greg Haller, Conservation Director for the Pacific Rivers Council. “We’ve known for decades that dams create unsafe temperature pollution that will only get worse with climate change. We cannot allow energy profits to push salmon to the edge of extinction.”

WHAT IS THE LAW?

The Clean Water Act prohibits temperature in the Columbia River to exceed 68 degrees. And the Endangered Species Act is designed to protect critically imperiled species from extinction. But the government agencies in charge of the Columbia and Snake River dam system aren’t obeying the law. In late July, the Columbia’s temperature at Bonneville Dam exceeded 72

degrees. According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, this is the third summer in a row where water temperatures are higher than ever.

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

Dams are the main culprit causing the salmon crisis. The dams increase water temperature by creating large reservoirs. The dams cause the rivers to remain warmer than natural during the late summer and fall, thereby increasing the number of days each year that the rivers are too warm for healthy salmon migration.

According to EPA's study, dams are not created equal when it comes to temperature impacts. The lower four Snake River dams—Lower Granite, Ice Harbor, Little Goose, and Lower Monumental—have a major impact on temperature. Each of the four dams raises the Snake River's temperature by two to four degrees Fahrenheit.¹ On the mainstem Columbia, Grand Coulee Dam is by far the biggest temperature driver, capable of raising the Columbia River's temperature by more than 11 degrees Fahrenheit.² That's a stunning impact on water temperature.

"One solution is to remove the four lower Snake River dams. Based on EPA's temperature study, these dams mean the difference between life and death for sockeye salmon," stated Buck Ryan, Executive Director, Snake River Waterkeeper.

Columbia Riverkeeper is offering media boat tours of sites on the Columbia River that includes sockeye salmon that died before reaching their spawning grounds.

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¹ Columbia/Snake Rivers Preliminary Draft Temperature TMDL at 30 (July 2003) (stating that the maximum impact of Lower Granite, Little Goose, Lower Monumental, and Ice Harbor are 2.08° Celsius, 2.18°, 1.31°, and 1.20° Celsius, respectively).

² Columbia/Snake Rivers Preliminary Draft Temperature TMDL at 30 (July 2003) (stating that Grand Coulee Dam's maximum effect on temperature is 6.23° Celsius, which is equivalent to approximately 12° Celsius).