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EPA RELEASES TEMPERATURE PLAN FOR COLUMBIA AND SNAKE RIVERS

Plan shows Lower Snake River dams significantly warm the river throughout summer and fall.

May 19, 2020 (Seattle, WA; Portland, OR; Boise, ID)—Today, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), released a [long-overdue plan](#) to protect salmon and steelhead from dangerously warm river temperatures on the Snake and Columbia rivers. The plan was mandated by the Ninth Circuit Court after conservation and fishing industry groups, represented by the law firm Advocates for the West, sued EPA for failing to protect salmon from hot water in the Columbia and Snake rivers.

The plan and study (called a Total Maximum Daily Load or TMDL) clearly shows how warm water—caused by large, shallow reservoirs, coupled with intensifying climate change—threatens the Columbia and Snake rivers' already imperiled salmon and steelhead. For example, the Lower Snake River dams increase water temperature by .7 to 3.2 degrees C throughout the summer and fall, which can be a matter of life or death for salmon and steelhead. The plan, however, does not dictate specific actions to cool the rivers and meet water quality standards.

“The release of EPA’s plan is a victory in the journey to restore salmon and steelhead in the Snake and the Columbia. It took two decades to get this plan, but we need to take action now to save these species.” said Brett VandenHeuvel, Executive Director of Columbia Riverkeeper.

“Our members’ livelihoods, and the economies of many coastal fishing-dependant communities, depend on healthy salmon runs,” said Glen Spain, Northwest Regional Director of the Pacific

Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations, a commercial fishing industry trade association. "It's simply unacceptable to let the water in the river get so hot that it kills otherwise-healthy adult salmon by the tens of thousands before they can spawn. We're glad EPA finally did its job."

"Hot water in the lower Snake and Columbia rivers has been a year-in, year-out problem for endangered salmon," said Nic Nelson, Executive Director of Idaho Rivers United. "This victory will create more protections for endangered species that are an indelible part of our northwest way of life, culture, economy, and heritage."

"This is a clear victory for critically endangered salmon and steelhead populations" said Snake River Waterkeeper Buck Ryan. "We must swiftly implement EPA's plan to protect what remains of the once-magnificent anadromous fisheries on the Snake, Clearwater, and Salmon rivers—starting with removing the Lower Snake River dams."

The Ninth Circuit Court denied the EPA's appeal in March, 2020, and [ruled in favor of conservation and trade groups](#) in December, 2019, to protect salmon and reduce water temperatures.

For more information, visit columbiariverkeeper.org, snakeriverwaterkeeper.org, idahorivers.org, pcffa.org, ifrfish.org, and advocateswest.org.

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RESOURCES:

- **May 18, 2020, [TMDL Plan](#)**
- [March 30, 2020 Ninth Circuit Opinion](#)
- December 20, 2019, [Ninth Circuit Opinion](#)
- [Photos of 2015 sockeye salmon die-off](#)

BACKGROUND: Water in the Columbia and Snake rivers is too hot for salmon and steelhead throughout most of every summer. In 2003, EPA studied the causes of hot water 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? Because EPA found that dams are the main cause of temperature problems. The dams create large, shallow reservoirs that soak up the sun's energy, warming the river. Because of this case, EPA had to issue a temperature plan to protect salmon.

PARTNERS: Columbia Riverkeeper, Snake River Waterkeeper, Idaho Rivers United, Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations, and the Institute for Fisheries Resources brought the original lawsuit. The groups are represented by the law firm Advocates for the West. Advocates for the West litigates to protect western public lands, waters, and wildlife.

WHAT IS THE LAW? The Clean Water Act prohibits temperature in the Columbia and Lower Snake rivers from exceeding 68 degrees. 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 dams are not obeying the law. The release of today's water quality plan should help bring the rivers' temperatures back in line with the needs of salmon—and the requirements of the Clean Water Act and the Endangered Species Act.