

Mason County Power Providers Disappointed with Court Ruling on Experimental Spill at Columbia River Dams

Diverting water from power generation could result in local increase in power prices.



(MASON COUNTY, WA) – Mason County’s two Public Utility Districts expressed disappointment in a federal court ruling today that will result in a \$40 million experimental water spill program at Columbia and Snake River dams.



The ruling from the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco upheld a decree from Federal Judge Michael Simon. In a Portland decision, Judge Simon ordered the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to start the program April 3.

The experiment is aimed at determining if sending more water through dam spillways instead of using it for power generation, will help the passage of salmon in the Columbia River Basin.

“We have no way of knowing if this experiment will be successful,” said Steven Taylor, Mason PUD 1 manager. “NOAA Fisheries data suggests that spilling more water may increase dissolved gases in the river, which is actually harmful to fish.”

“What this means, is that public power customers are once again being asked to pick up the bill for more tinkering with the management of the river system,” said Annette Creekpaum, Mason PUD 3 manager. “Combined, this experiment will cost local electricity customers of the two public utility districts about \$500,000.”

Creekpaum added, “If the judge’s ruling results in higher power prices from the Bonneville Power Administration, this will have to be passed along to PUD 3 customers. This would be shown as a specific line item on customer bills. Depending on how much electricity a customer uses, the amount of their monthly bill that already goes to Columbia River fish and wildlife programs ranges between 25 and 30 percent.”

PUD 1 plans to itemize the “spill surcharge” on their monthly billing statements as well, for the duration of the excess spill mandate.

“Management of Columbia River system for fish and hydropower is subject to the 2014 Federal Biological Opinion,” said Joel Myer, Mason PUD 3’s public information and government relations manager. “There’s a lot of concern by those who use the river for their livelihoods about the increased role of the courts in control of this mighty resource. Management of the river by appointed judges is precedent-setting. It bypasses science, the experts, and may not be in the best interests of all parties.”