



## STUDIES: CONDIT DAM REMOVAL WOULD REDUCE MERCURY ACCUMULATION IN FISH

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Studies indicate that the release of sediment during the removal of the White Salmon River's Condit Dam would actually reduce risks from mercury by making it "less likely to accumulate in fish," according to a draft Second Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement released today for public comment.

The review produced by the Washington Department of Ecology is available for comment until July 20.

PacifiCorp, which owns the hydro project, plans to begin removing the dam in October of 2010, contingent on obtaining necessary regulatory approvals. The dam has generated hydro-power since 1913.

To satisfy State Environmental Policy Act requirements, the department completed a final EIS in 2007. It supplemented earlier National Environmental Policy Act EISs produced by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission in 1996 and 2002.

The final SEIS addresses both long-term and short-term water quality concerns, including how backed up sediments and debris would be managed as well as what effects dam removal would have on wetlands, endangered fish and fish passage. It outlines actions the company must take to lessen environmental harm during removal of the dam.

But after the final SEIS was published, additional sampling reported mercury levels in Northwestern Lake sediment that exceed screening criteria, thus warranting further analysis. That brought into question the conclusions of the final SEIS concerning contaminants in the sediment and effects of releasing them.

Ecology undertook the supplemental review to better understand the implications of releasing the sediments behind the dam during dam removal. Elevated levels of naturally occurring mercury were found in some of the sediments.

Mercury is ubiquitous in the environment from naturally occurring sources and from atmospheric deposition. It is not uncommon to find mercury in sediments behind dams.

Mercury can cause serious health problems for those who eat large amounts of contaminated fish. Exposure to the developing fetus and young children is of particular concern.

In addition to addressing the sediment issue, the draft second supplemental environmental impact statement for the Condit Dam removal project looks at a change in the proposed location for disposing of concrete during demolition of the dam.

Ecology previously conducted an environmental review of the project comparing the effects of continued operation of the dam with dam removal. The environmental reviews are necessary for the agency to issue regulatory approvals associated with the project.

In particular, before the dam may be removed, PacifiCorp must obtain a Section 401 Water Quality Certification from Ecology. The 401 certification under the federal Clean Water Act would certify that water quality standards and other water-protection regulations are met during dam removal and subsequent restoration. The 401 would outline the steps PacifiCorp must take to protect water quality during dam removal.

Removing the dam would restore river flow and provide access to as much as 15.3 to 32.4 miles of river and tributary habitat for anadromous salmon and steelhead, respectively, and would restore connectivity to foraging, spawning, rearing, and overwintering habitat for bull trout in the lower White Salmon River. Dam removal would result in increased salmonid (steelhead, salmon, and bull trout) production potential.

The draft SSEIS for the Condit Dam Removal Project can be viewed on-line at the following link: <http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/cwp/condit.html>