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Lower Monumental Dam is one of four lower Snake River dams that help power the region. PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS

Save the Lower Snake River Dams

By Jim Smith, KPUD General Manager

Some of you may have heard about the recent settlement that would impact the dams along the lower Snake River. The White House's settlement is outlined in a document titled "U.S. Government Commitments in Support of the Columbia River Basin Restoration Initiative and in Partnership with the Six Sovereigns." The Six Sovereigns are the Nez Perce Tribe, Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation, the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, and the states of Washington and Oregon.

Throughout the entirety of the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service process, electric utilities in the Pacific Northwest have not been afforded any opportunity to meaningfully engage with our knowledge and experience. Considering this settlement seems to chart a path to develop resources to replace the lower Snake River dams, it would seem useful to involve the utilities that operate the systems and are responsible for serving the region with reliable and affordable power.

Unfortunately, this settlement was negotiated by the United States government and the Six Sovereigns in

secret without input from utilities or utility customers. When our concerns were voiced, a small group of public utilities were allowed one phone call to ask questions. Shockingly, all of our questions had to be asked in confidence via the Federal Mediation Service and could not be discussed in public. We were given three days to provide written questions. Those questions were not addressed in the White House's final document. There was also no attempt to involve you, the customer, in the future of your electric system, despite the fact you all will fund the commitments being made, either through taxes or electric rates.

The part that really disappoints me is not being given the opportunity for our region to work together on our energy future. I honestly think that electric utility input is not wanted because we are saying that the fun, sexy, marketable "green" power options that play well in political campaigns will not realistically work on the timeline being proposed. We know wind and solar cannot meet the coming electrification loads even with battery storage, the dams need to stay in place and the region needs new baseload and dispatchable generation to keep the lights on in the coming years. The Bonneville Power Administration itself completed

a study just last year that came to this same conclusion. There are physical and engineering constraints that are real, even if some do not like them.

Despite these facts, part of the commitments made by the government includes funding yet another energy program to build renewable energy projects that would supposedly meet our electric requirements in the future and allow the removal of the lower Snake River dams. **BPA's part alone in the next 10 years is at least \$300 million. Of your money. Through your local utilities. Without your input.**

There continues to be a belief that we can hit the easy button, build more wind and solar, and doing that will solve all of our problems. It won't. Why aren't we having discussions and involving the valuable insights of the industries that actually run the power systems? Renewables must be part of the solution. They cannot be all of the solution. Why do we have a new secret agreement that spends more money on a path that is destined to fail?

If you are interested in reading about this, the relevant documents are available at www.klickitatpud.com/news/2023/12/19/us-government-commitments-support-columbia-basin-restoration-initiative.