



The Columbian

In Our View: Remove Condit Dam

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Columbian editorial writers

Ultimate benefits are worth the early effects

The short-term effects of dismantling 94-year-old Condit Dam on the White Salmon River would not be pretty: Shock waves from possible blasting would kill any fish in the immediate vicinity. Fish and aquatic life downstream and into the Columbia River as far as Bonneville Dam would be threatened by the sediment plume. A 5-foot blanket of sediment would cover about 100 acres of river bottom. High river turbidity could continue for up to a year.

Despite all of that, the project carries long-term benefits powerful enough to warrant public support. Last Friday the project cleared another hurdle when the Washington Department of Ecology released an environmental statement. Ultimately, the agency will have to certify final project plans before it can go forward.

PacificCorp, the Portland-based utility, has been trying for eight years to gain approval for removing the obsolete 125-foot-high dam about 65 miles east of Vancouver. Environmentalists, though alarmed by the negative short-term impacts described above, are encouraged by the long-term effects: As much as 32 miles of river habitat would be restored for spawning and rearing of salmon, steelhead and bull trout. In a few years, the free-flowing nature of the stream would be returned. In respiratory terms, a severe cough would be replaced by free breathing.

This dam removal, which would be the largest such project ever in the country, makes more than just good economic sense for the electric utility that wants to spend \$20 million to tear it down. It makes good sense from the environmental perspective because it would prove that humans are capable of repairing damage inflicted upon nature. It would be a good example that could lead to other nature-friendly dam removals.

But not before a massive mess, 2.2 million cubic yards of sediment, is removed from behind the dam. Like an overdue visit to the dentist, let's get it over with.