

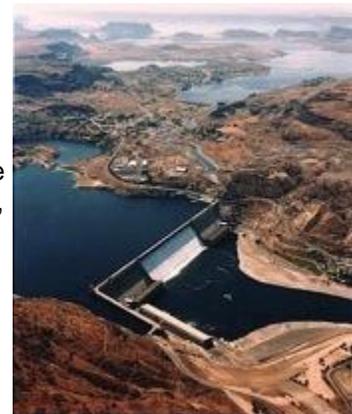
News Release
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**CELP and Columbia Riverkeeper challenge federal government over Columbia River future
U.S. Bureau of Reclamation fails to address subsidy, climate change in water decisions**

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Seattle - Today the Center for Environmental Law & Policy (CELP) and Columbia Riverkeeper (CRK) filed suit in federal district court in Seattle to stop the US Bureau of Reclamation from giving away water rights from the Columbia River without first involving the public in an environmental analysis. The lawsuit will have a major impact on water in the West because of the looming issues of climate change, water shortages, cost to taxpayers, and the major role of the Bureau in managing the West's water. [image: Grand Coulee Dam, Lake Roosevelt, and water diversions to the Columbia Basin Project. USBR photo]



“Climate change will only aggravate problems already facing the Columbia River,” said Rachael Paschal Osborn, CELP's director. “The Bureau must first analyze climate change impacts and the enormity of the taxpayer and ratepayer subsidy before taking more water from the Columbia River.”

CELP and CRK seek review for 5 major issues:

- 1) the effect of climate change on the Columbia River
- 2) the effect of lowering water levels of Lake Roosevelt and exposing toxic slag deposited by the Teck Cominco smelter just north of the U.S.-Canadian border;
- 3) impacts on river flows needed by migrating salmon;
- 4) the cumulative effects of the multiple proposals for new dams and new water projects that would take water from the Columbia River; and
- 5) the costs to taxpayers and ratepayers for expanding the nation's largest federal reclamation project – the Columbia Basin Project.

The Lake Roosevelt drawdown is intended to provide water for municipalities, industries, supplement junior water rights, and augment instream flows in the Columbia River. Washington State claims a fish benefit. However the Department of Ecology's own analysis acknowledges that the amount of water released for fish will be imperceptible.

The federal courts have previously ruled that the federal government is required to involve the public in environmental analysis on similar projects. In a case involving the Black Canyon of the Gunnison River in Colorado, the National Park Service gave away federal water rights that were needed to protect instream flows. The court held that that action was invalid for failure to provide to the public an environmental

analysis. The Park Service recently announced a settlement that will protect instream flows and environmental values.

In another case involving a federal reclamation project in the Central Valley of California, the federal court held that the Bureau must consider the impacts of climate change on stream flow as part of its operating plan.

“Columbia Riverkeeper spends significant amounts of time and energy to reduce toxic threats facing the Columbia River,” said Lauren Goldberg, Conservation Director for Columbia Riverkeeper. “The Lake Roosevelt Drawdown Project will expose toxic sediments that accumulated from upstream sources. Yet, Reclamation has shirked its duty. Federal law requires that Reclamation analyze the environmental impacts of the Drawdown Project and propose alternative courses of action, including no action. Reclamation’s decision to ignore the law and proceed with this high-impact project is simply unacceptable given the human health risks associated with toxic pollution.”

During the 1980s, the Bureau halted plans to expand water to the Odessa after [WSU economists](#) and a [GAO Investigation](#) warned that taxpayers and ratepayers -- not irrigators -- would bear the cost. Current acreage irrigated with CBP water stands at about 650,000 acres. Federal taxpayers and BPA ratepayers subsidize irrigators in many ways: pumping water uphill at Grand Coulee Dam is a major user of energy and precludes water from generating hydropower at downstream dams. Substantial public monies are also spent on canal infrastructure, as well as on salmon recovery.

In the most recent effort by the Bureau to take water from the Columbia River to expand the CBP, the agency is basing its economic justification on a [study paid for by the Potato Commission](#). In June, CELP released an [economic review by economist Joel Hamilton](#) debunking the analysis and its use.

CELP and Columbia Riverkeeper are represented by Chris Winter of the Crag Law Center. Winter stated, "The Bureau has sidestepped our most basic public participation laws in deciding to divert yet more water from the Columbia River. The public has a fundamental right to weigh in on these issues before the government gives away public resources."