

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

March 30, 2020

The Honorable Mary Neumayr
Chair
Council on Environmental Quality
730 Jackson Place N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20506

Dear Madam Chair:

We write to request an extension of the 45-day public comment period currently underway for the Federal Register notice entitled *EIS No. 20200052, Draft, BR, BPA, USACE, OR, Columbia River System Operations*. Due to the ongoing 2019 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic—and the specific toll that it is taking on the Pacific Northwest—it is our concern that this important matter cannot receive the thoughtful consideration that it requires under these circumstances.

Given the unique nature of this crisis, it is paramount that all of our national resources and energies be focused on effecting a comprehensive response. The current crisis cannot plausibly provide for an environment conducive to robust public comment. Public feedback should be solicited in an accessible manner and, crucially, in-person, so that the citizens who stand to be affected most directly can make their voices heard to the officials charged with making these decisions. Accordingly, we request the extension of this comment period until no sooner than 30 days after the conclusion of the public health emergency as declared by the Secretary of Health and Human Services.

The Administrative Procedure Act and the National Environmental Policy Act are clear: agencies must incorporate the feedback from public comments into final rules, including in instances when the rules stand to have significant and long-term environmental impacts. The Columbia River System is a vital resource to the region, and a diverse array of stakeholders are counting on this specific environmental impact statement to bring a degree of finality and certainty to these issues. This can only be accomplished through a transparent public comment process that includes public meetings. This is an issue not of ideology, but one of public safety and full faith in institutions to be responsive to the most pressing matters.

We stand ready to work with the Administration to expeditiously extend the comment period or have the public comment period reopened once this national crisis has been addressed. In this moment, our collective energies are best served working to hasten that moment.

Thank you for your swift consideration of this pressing matter.

Sincerely,

Patty Murray
United States Senator

Maria Cantwell
United States Senator

Ron Wyden
United States Senator

Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator

Adam Smith
Member of Congress

Rick Larsen
Member of Congress

Derek Kilmer
Member of Congress

Suzanne Bonamici
Member of Congress

Earl Blumenauer
Member of Congress

Suzan K. DelBene
Member of Congress

Pramila Jayapal
Member of Congress

Kim Schrier, M.D.
Member of Congress

Denny Heck
Member of Congress