



Press Release:

**Pacific Rivers, Idaho Rivers United File Petition Challenging Clean Water Act Certification for the Hells Canyon Complex by Oregon Department of Environmental Quality**

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**Portland, OR (July 22, 2019)** Today, conservation groups Pacific Rivers and Idaho Rivers United filed a petition in Multnomah County challenging the issuance of water quality certification under section 401 of the Clean Water Act by the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) for the Hells Canyon Complex. The three dams, owned and operated by Idaho Power Company, are located on the reach of the Snake River that forms the border of Oregon and Idaho. In their complaint, the conservation groups argue that DEQ failed to follow the requirements of state and federal law when they certified the dams will meet water quality standards for temperature and mercury. Additionally, the groups say the recent settlement agreement between Oregon and Idaho Power regarding fish passage fails to comply with the requirements of Oregon's fish passage law.

Idaho Power Company is seeking a new fifty-year license for the dams from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) and water quality certification by Oregon and Idaho is necessary component before FERC can issue the new license.

“The Hells Canyon Complex has an enormous impact on water quality and salmon populations in the Snake River, said Greg Haller, Executive Director of Pacific Rivers. The actions proposed by Idaho Power, and certified by DEQ, are far too speculative to ensure compliance with important water quality standards. It's a leap of faith that salmon can't afford to take.”

Brownlee Reservoir is a popular fishery but anglers are warned not to consume fish they catch due to the high levels of mercury contained in their flesh.

“Idaho's rivers are one of the defining hallmarks of our State and the core of protecting all that they provide is water quality”, said Nic Nelson, Executive Director of Idaho Rivers United. “Idaho Power has failed to protect the rights of Idahoans in sustaining the important fisheries of the Snake through the proposed actions on the dams it operates. Compliance with water quality standards is not optional, and we must take action to preserve the integrity of this river system.”

Salmon once swam far upriver of the dams deep into Idaho, Oregon and Nevada. Today, however, the dams block fish passage for all species, eliminating important spawning habitat and fisheries in all three states.

Pacific Rivers and Idaho Rivers United are represented by the Environmental and Land Use Clinic of University Legal Assistance at Gonzaga University School of Law in Spokane, Washington.