



I. **Protect the numerous benefits of the Snake River dams**

In an era of electrification and increased power demand, it makes no sense to remove a clean, renewable power source. Hydropower is an important source of reliable and clean energy for everyone in the Northwest. The lower Snake River Dams are critical to the infrastructure of the region, providing not only power benefits but also reductions in flood risk, crop irrigation, barging, and much more.

Unlike intermittent wind and solar power, the Snake River dams provide more than 1,000 average megawatts of reliable baseload, carbon-free energy that can be turned on at any moment. That's enough energy for over 800,000 average U.S. homes.

Removing the Snake River dams would have serious negative regional impacts

The federal government undertook a multi-year public process in 2020 to produce a comprehensive review of the issues surrounding the Snake River dams and possible breaching. Here are some of the findings from that study:¹

- “[Dam breaching] would not meet the objective to Provide a Reliable and Economic Power Supply . . . The lower Snake River projects provide more than 2,000 MW of sustained peaking capabilities during the winter, and a quarter of the federal power system’s current reserves holding capability. The dams play an important role in maintaining reliability in the production of power used to supply

¹ “Executive Summary - Columbia River System Operations Environmental Impact Statement,” U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Bureau of Reclamation and Bonneville Power Administration, available at <https://usace.contentdm.oclc.org/utills/getfile/collection/p16021coll7/id/14957>

load in the Pacific Northwest. Their flexibility and dispatchability are valuable components of the CRS. [Dam breaching] would more than double the region's risk of power shortages..."

- "The costs of an expanded zero-carbon resource portfolio designed to replace the full capability of the four lower Snake River dams would be significant: up to twice the \$400 million assumed to maintain regional reliability. Additional variables such as resource financing uncertainties and the uncertainty in the cost and availability of demand response add to this rate sensitivity. If Bonneville had to replace the four lower Snake River projects' full capability with zero-carbon resources, the rate pressure could be up to 50% on wholesale power rates."
- "The lower Snake River shallow draft navigation channel would no longer be available, eliminating commercial navigation to multiple port facilities on the lower Snake River... As a result, the cost to transport goods to market would increase."
- "Under this scenario, increases in vehicular accident rates, highway traffic and congestion would occur. In addition, additional wear and tear on roadways could result in additional road repair costs of up to \$10 million annually."
- "Farmers could also experience increased production costs associated with higher transportation costs for upriver movements (i.e., fertilizer, crops). There would be additional demands on existing road and rail infrastructure as well as at barging facilities near the Tri-Cities, Washington, increasing traffic and air pollution."

- “Adverse regional economic effects would occur as the jobs and income provided by the four primary commercial navigation ports would be curtailed, including the Port of Lewiston, the Port of Clarkston, the Port of Whitman County (Wilma, Almota, Central Ferry), and the Port of Garfield.”
- “Despite the major benefits to fish expected from [dam breaching], this alternative was not identified as the Preferred Alternative due to the adverse impacts to other resources such as transportation, power reliability and affordability, and greenhouse gas emissions.”

Baseload power is needed to counter the unreliability of intermittent power sources like wind and solar

Among the many benefits of the Snake River dams is the reliable baseload power provided. This is critical when the energy system is stressed during periods of extreme cold or heat. The 2023 Winter was a great case study for the reliability problem of intermittent green sources like wind and solar that are being pushed nationwide. Consider the following examples from Montana and Washington.

In Montana, Northwestern Energy spokesperson Jo Dee Black commented, “Wind and solar generation could not produce much if any, power during the extreme cold.”²

In Washington, Grant County PUD stated, “frigid temperatures throughout Grant County and the Pacific Northwest pushed energy use to record levels, strained

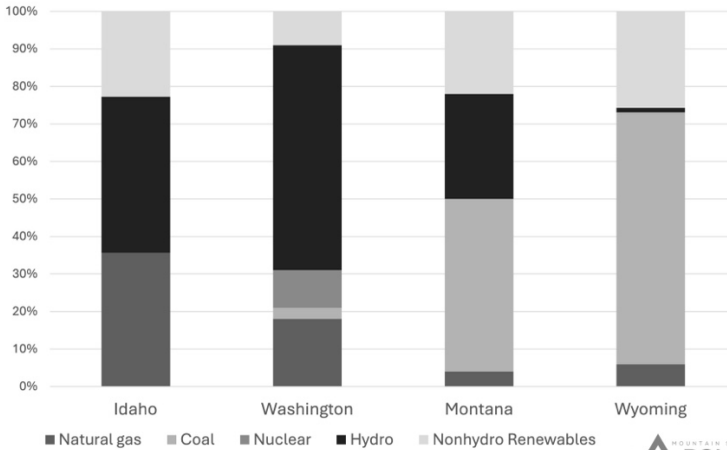
² “Cold snap fuels Montana’s coal power debate,” Montana Freepress, January 22, 2024, available at <https://montanafreepress.org/2024/01/22/cold-snap-fuels-montanas-coal-power-debate/>

many regional electric grids, and put a heavy draw on our region’s capacity to generate electricity.”³

The same problem occurs during periods of extreme heat. Wind and solar intermittent energy sources are not reliable. Wind specifically disappears when there are extremely high or low temperatures. This is why it is critical to have reliable baseload power sources to pick up the slack when energy demand is high to avoid blackouts.

State power portfolios

As of 2024



Diversification efforts of the power grid are a worthy goal if they don’t come at the expense of reliable baseload power. When families try to stay warm during an arctic blast or try to stay cool during extreme heat, policymakers need to make sure the power is reliably and economically available for them.

³ “Arctic blast flashes warning signal for regional grid stability and reliance on intermittent power sources,” Mountain States Policy Center, January 24, 2024, available at <https://www.mountainstatespolicy.org/cold-snap-flashes-warning-signal-for-regional-grid-stability-and-reliance-on-intermittent-power-sour>

As states navigate the complexities of the energy transition, sustainability, and affordability, they must be wary of using intermittent sources to replace reliable baseload power such as the energy and other economic benefits provided by the Snake River dams.

II. Work to restore more state control over federal land

Federal land is defined as land that is owned by the United States federal government. The Property Clause in Article 4 Section 3 of the United States Constitution gives the federal government the right to manage and purchase land and regulate the activities that take place on that land.

The federal government owns approximately 640 million acres of federal land, which comprises about 28% of the 2.27 billion total acres of land in the United States.

The original, intended purpose of government-managed federal land is the “protection of forests and preservation of water flows while permitting some local timber use.” Presently, all federal land is managed by five government agencies:

- (1) The Bureau of Land Management;
- (2) The Forest Service;
- (3) The Fish and Wildlife Service;
- (4) The National Park Service; and
- (5) The Department of Defense.

The federal government’s land management has faced sometimes intense criticism from the general public. Some argue the federal management is ineffective, some say too much land is owned by the federal government, and some contend the land has economic benefits and should be returned to private citizens.

States with the highest percentage of public land

State	Federal %	State %	Total
Alaska	61.0%	34.8%	95.8%
Nevada	80.1%	7.7%	87.8%
Utah	63.1%	12.1%	75.2%
Idaho	62.9%	7.5%	70.4%

III. Demand higher federal PILT reimbursements

One way the federal government attempts to mitigate potential losses in economic activity for states with large amounts of federal land is by compensating them with Payments in Lieu of Taxes, or “PILT.” Since federal land is owned by the government and cannot be taxed, PILTs are a way that the federal government attempts to aid citizens living near federal land by giving each county a payment which is calculated based on the number of acres owned by the federal government and the county’s population. The PILT approach is not necessarily the most effective because it does not take into consideration the amount of federal land in each county when determining how much to pay.

Because several counties with the highest amount of federal land are also rural and have lower populations, the amount they received in PILT does not reflect the amount of untaxable federal land within their borders. This system leaves rural counties struggling to provide public goods and services since they are unable to tax such a large portion of their territory, and the federal government fails to assist them in bridging that gap.

Another common criticism of the federal government’s land ownership is that federal land is often managed ineffectively. The Bureau of Land Management has set a series of land-health standards which measure biological conditions on federal lands such as soil health, water quality, and the protection of endangered species. These

standards must be maintained for the use of these federal lands to be sustainable.

However, the Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER) conducted a study on 21,000 allotments of federal land across several states and found that many assessed allotments failed to meet the Bureau of Land Management's health standards. These mismanaged areas were most commonly found in cold desert ecoregions and researchers there observed extreme temperature swings and a lack of moisture. PEER determined that the primary cause of this damage was livestock grazing on federal land. This sharp decline in land health is detrimental to the plants and animals that live within these territories and demonstrates a distinct failure on the part of the federal government to effectively manage and protect this land.

Improved economic outlook by moving federal land to state control

Finally, critics of federal land management argue that transferring ownership of federal land to the states would result in significant financial benefits. In states such as Idaho, where agriculture is a major industry and where the federal government owns two-thirds of the total land, concerns are raised about the large amounts of revenue that Idahoans lose, even though the federal government attempts to mitigate these potential losses through measures such as PILTs.

The Property and Environment Research Center (PERC) looked at the financial returns produced by federally-owned land, as well as state-owned land in four western states and found that these four states earned an average revenue of \$14.51 for every dollar spent on state land management. This is in sharp contrast to the average of 73 cents earned for each dollar spent on federal land

management – a whopping 95% lower. The study also compared the management of timber, grazing, minerals, and recreation by both state and federal governments and determined that state management of these industries can produce significantly higher revenue than the current system of federal management, which would greatly assist local economies.

There is significant evidence to suggest that states would benefit if the federal government transferred some of this land to local control. State policymakers should work on efforts to make this happen.

IV. Support prescribed burns to help manage forests

When the summer heat intensifies each year, peak fire season hits the western states hard. Consider the fact that Oregon (4), Idaho (5), Montana (9), and Washington (10) suffered more acres burned than most of the United States in 2022, all ranking in the top ten states of acreage burned in 2020 to 2022 (rank refers to 2022). Utah (21) and Wyoming (22) trailed slightly behind. Despite the ongoing fire danger and consequences, prescribed burns are used sparingly on federal lands in the mountain states.

Prescribed burning is underutilized in our region because the federal government owns the majority of public lands. Tribal and state agencies in the mountain states are increasing the funding for prescribed burns, but the area managed by these authorities is much smaller compared to federal lands. For example, 61.6% of Idaho lands are owned by the federal government and only 8.8% are owned by the state.

The federal government's feet dragging on prescribed burning keeps the mountain states from many positive

benefits.⁴ Historically, Native American tribes worked with nature to encourage fires where they were needed, managing fuel loads and deterring extreme fire behavior. However, a century of fire suppression tactics has increased the fuel load and combined with hotter and drier weather to create the extreme fire seasons the mountain states experience annually.

Despite this, tribes have been able to work within their smaller government systems to adopt prescribed burning practices and the results have returned once high-risk forests to healthier, historically correct states. But for federal-owned lands the battle is more cumbersome. Overwhelmed by red tape, lacking in generational knowledge of prescribed burns, and inundated with complaints of smoke inhalation and fire risk, federal lands still pursue mostly a fire suppression strategy. Fire resource budgets are almost entirely dedicated to suppressing fires no matter location or cause, and prescribed fires are rarely budgeted.

Federal lands in our region have a long way to go before they catch up on the long list of unhealthy forests. Millions of acres need treated but only thousands of acres are treated annually. It will take years of prescribed burns and harvesting to restore the western lands.

Important policies to improve forest health

Federal officials need to act now to adopt prescribed fire practices on a scale that can provide an actual solution to the growing pressure of unhealthy forests and excessive fuel loads. Policies that would improve the use of prescribed fires include:⁵

⁴ "We're Not Doing Enough Prescribed Fire in the Western United States to Mitigate Wildfire Risk," MDPI, May 29, 2019, available at <https://www.mdpi.com/2571-6255/2/2/30/html>

⁵ "2021 National Prescribed Fire Use Survey Report," National Association of State Foresters, available at https://www.prescribedfire.net/pdf/2021-National-Bx-Fire-Use-Report_FINAL.pdf

- Encouraging federal land agencies to request federal funding for sufficient fuel reduction projects and dedicating state-level funding;
- Ensure the EPA's Clean Air Act rule will not hinder the use of prescribed burns;
- Easing the permitting process so burn permits can be issued quickly (Idaho and Wyoming require longer than a day for authorization);
- Offer prescribed burn manager certification (only Washington offers it at this time); and
- Adopt a right-to-burn act, allowing private landowners to burn on their own land (only permitted in Oregon and Utah).

Unlike wildfire, new policies are difficult to move uphill, but prescribed burning is worth the push. Regional legislators have submitted multiple policies to remediate the western landscape, but progress has been sparse. The iconic forests of the mountain states need healthy, well-managed fire to thrive. Prescribed burning needs rapid and significant adoption to be beneficial to the mountain states' scenic region.

V. Avoid trendy policies that have little environmental benefit

A trend. A fad. Feel-good legislation. Call plastic bag bans whatever you want, just don't call them effective environmental policy.

Dozens of cities and states across the nation have either adopted or are considering adopting bans on plastics.

The question is whether banning plastic bags makes sense and can help the environment? The answer is likely no. In fact, much of the research shows plastic bags can be one of the most environmentally friendly options. There are numerous reasons for this.

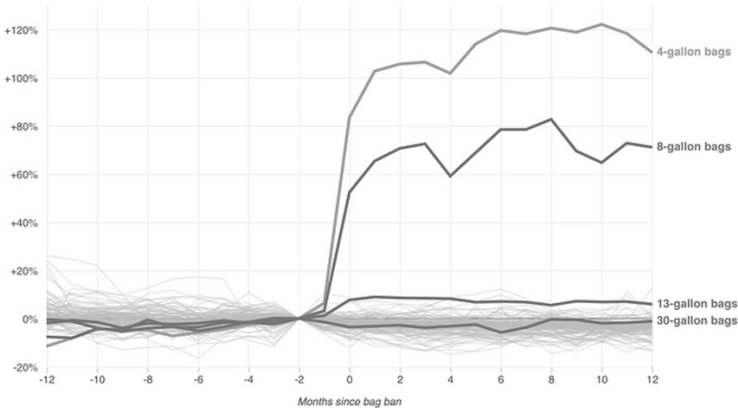
First, plastic bags are reusable. Think about how many times you've reused a plastic bag to take a lunch to work, to clean up after your dog, or to fill a trash container in your bathroom. Without those bags available, consumers look for alternatives and end up buying *more* plastic bags.

The school of Forestry and Natural Resources at the University of Georgia released a study concluding:

"The study found California communities with bag policies saw sales of 4-gallon trash bags increase by 55% to 75%, and sales of 8-gallon trash bags increase 87% to 110%."

Trash bag sales increased after grocery bag bans

University of Georgia



Second, the plastic bag alternatives are not much better. The United Kingdom's Environment Agency released a report in 2011 that highlighted the carbon impact of paper, reusable plastic, and cotton bags is *higher* than single-use plastic bags. In fact, scientists said you'd need to reuse a cotton bag more than 130 times to have an impact on the environment. Danish researchers had similar findings.

Third, there are sanitation concerns. Most people who carry around reusable, cloth bags do not necessarily take care to make sure the bag is clean. Some may keep the bag in their backseat or the trunk of their vehicle. Others might only wash the bag once a month. The concern about sanitation was especially high during the COVID-19 pandemic, when a number of states that had adopted bans decided to hold off because of hygiene concerns. So, while plastic bag bans may make policymakers feel good, the research shows they are a very ineffective way to protect the environment and can actually do more harm than good. They should be avoided.