

OPINION & PERSPECTIVES

Guest Column: The Righteous Shall Prevail, or Perhaps Fail?

by Darryll Olsen

On June 12, 2025, the Trump administration issued a presidential memorandum directing all federal agencies to rescind involvement in the commitments and responsibilities stated in the 2024 lower Snake River (LSR) litigation settlement agreement, signed with the state of Oregon, Earthjustice, and several key Native American tribes like the Nez Perce. Although the agreement stayed litigation, requiring further river operations review, administration provocation was praised by some river system and regional power interests.

Being a defendant-intervener, the Columbia-Snake River Irrigators Association (CSRIA) joined the plaintiffs and defendants supporting the 2024 agreement, then formally ordered by U.S. District Judge Michael Simon of Oregon ([Clearing Up No. 2144](#)). Over the course of five to 10 years, regional review of LSR dam breaching criteria and other fish mitigation actions would be assessed. A breach decision may have, or may not have, emerged thereafter.

No Secret Treaties

Some industry groups have wrapped themselves with propagandistic robes, crying out that they were not appreciably included in the settlement agreement process. Like the CSRIA, they were offered every opportunity to convey their positions, or state alternatives, during multiple mediation sessions ([Clearing Up No. 2137](#)). In denying this fact, they turn truth around backwards. The court accepted the plaintiffs' and defendants' mediation decision. That is how litigation works. That is how LSR dam breaching was placed on hold.

But apparently, this fuels a false sense of righteousness to plunge the region back into litigation.

What Were They Thinking?

Searching for a rational, or meaningful, justification for inflaming another episode of dam breaching litigation is roughly akin to Diogenes looking for the last honest man.

Were they thinking that Judge Simon would not become like a scorned Fallen Angel, ready to cast the hydro agencies and river industries into economic Hell? Did they ignore the plaintiffs' earlier preliminary injunction proposal that would impose irrigation-power system costs greater than actual LSR dam breaching ([Clearing Up No. 2013](#))? Did they think the tribes would ignore U.S. Department of Justice lawyers shredding the Stevens Treaties?

Not? Working Toward a Solution?

To suggest that the plaintiffs are not willing to "work with" the hydro agencies and river industries, after being forced into



U.S. Department of Energy/Flickr

[Little Goose Dam](#) on the Snake River in Washington.

new litigation, is pure hypocrisy. The court-ordered litigation stay was the "working together" period. Those now pushing the Trump administration to break the peace ignored any semblance of regional cooperation already in place and the presence of sustainable grace.

True Believers Confront Reality?

There is no shortage of feigned indignation and self-righteousness these days, the region, and nation seem to thrive on it. Even so, the CSRIA is more interested in securing a long-term commitment with the plaintiffs—for LSR hydro operations—than using self-affirming righteousness to provoke conflict. The CSRIA leadership will continue to listen to the plaintiffs, and perhaps they will even listen to us.

Darryll Olsen is board representative for the Columbia-Snake River Irrigators Association.

PEOPLE IN
POWER
A NewsData Podcast

Quinn Nakayama of PG&E on Partnering to Solve Problems With Innovation

In this episode of [People in Power](#), Abigail Sawyer and Quinn Nakayama, senior director of grid innovation and development for Pacific Gas & Electric, discuss the role of innovation and partnerships in solving California problems that include load shifting, load management and utility undergrounding. Recorded live at PG&E's Innovation Pitch Fest 2025 in Oakland.