

## HYDROPOWER

### Idaho Power clears hurdle in Hells Canyon license renewal

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Idaho and Oregon have completed key elements in a process that will allow the license renewal for a major hydroelectric project on the Snake River on the Idaho-Oregon border, an Idaho utility said Tuesday.

Idaho Power said the two states approved the company's water quality certification for the Hells Canyon Complex on Friday. The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission will now review the certification.

Idaho Power has been trying to obtain a new 50-year license for the three-dam complex after the old one expired in 2005, and it's been operating on annual licenses.

The utility had been caught in the middle of a fight between the two states over returning federally protected salmon and steelhead above the dams.

The deal that ultimately emerged involves Idaho Power spending more than \$400 million on water quality and habitat improvements, including narrowing and deepening key stretches of the Snake River between Walters Ferry and Homedale.

Idaho Power supplies electricity to nearly 534,000 customers in southern Idaho and eastern Oregon. The Hells Canyon Complex in a normal water year produces about 30% of the company's total annual power generation.

The complex, composed of the Brownlee, Oxbow and Hells Canyon dams, also provides about 70% of the company's hydroelectric generation, the company said.

The states' approval of the water certification "allows us to move forward with relicensing our most valuable asset," said Brett Dumas, director of environmental affairs for Idaho Power. "And it clears the way for a tremendous number of projects to improve the environment of the Snake River while Idaho Power continues to provide safe, reliable, clean energy into the future."

In a related relicensing matter, Idaho Power sued EPA last year seeking to force that agency to act on a request by the state of Idaho to modify water temperature standards below the hydroelectric project where federally protected fall chinook salmon reproduce.

The agency has responded, and now NOAA Fisheries is considering a possible analysis of how the dams harm salmon and orcas, which feed on salmon produced in the Columbia River Basin. — *Keith Ridler, Associated Press*

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