

**Full Committee Hearing on the Columbia River Treaty**  
**Opening Statement**  
**Senator Lisa Murkowski**  
**November 7, 2013**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for convening this oversight hearing on the future of the Columbia River Treaty. I also want to thank our distinguished witnesses for being here this morning. I look forward to listening to your perspectives on how to proceed with treaty negotiations.

It's not often that we have an opportunity to delve into international relations, but our Committee does seem to be on a roll lately. Just last month, we successfully passed legislation out of the Senate to implement the U.S.-Mexico Transboundary Agreement, which will help move us toward greater North American energy security. And today we are examining a transboundary water agreement with our neighbors to the north – or to the east, if you're from Alaska like I am – that has been in place for almost 50 years.

The Congressional Research Service has observed that the United States and Canada are “joined at the well” when it comes to energy. In this case, our countries are also very much “joined at the basin” – the Columbia River Basin, where we share the management of a significant water resource.

After historic flooding in the Northwest back in the 1940s, we came together to negotiate how best to coordinate flood risk management and optimize hydropower production. The resulting Columbia River Treaty, ratified in 1964, called for dam construction and increased reservoir storage in the basin for our shared benefit.

At that time, negotiators did not consider the region's tribal resources or account for fishery interests. As our nation now contemplates the continuation of this Treaty, perhaps with a new Ecosystem Function, we must work to find a balance between those and competing priorities such as flood control, navigation, water supply, and recreation—all while maintaining flexibility for the Pacific Northwest region.

I would also note that today's hearing is quite timely. Beginning in September 2014, either nation can provide a 10-year notice that it intends to unilaterally terminate the Treaty. To that end, both the Bonneville Power Administration and the Army Corps of Engineers, in their role as the “U.S. Entity,” have been reviewing the Treaty and have produced a Draft Recommendation with input from many of the stakeholders now before us. The U.S. Entity will make its final recommendation to the State Department this December on whether to continue, terminate, or amend the Treaty's provisions.

It is my hope that this oversight hearing, and the stakeholder testimony we receive through it, will further inform the U.S. Entity's work on the Columbia River Treaty. Ideally, we will find a path forward with our Canadian friends to update and modernize this Treaty so that it can continue to benefit both of our countries.

Mr. Chairman, thank you again for convening this hearing.