Testimony of:

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Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee,

Good morning. My name is Kristin Meira and I am the Executive Director of the Pacific Northwest Waterways Association, or PNWA. PNWA is a non-profit trade association that advocates for federal policies and funding in support of regional economic development. Our membership includes over 130 public ports, navigation, transportation, trade, tourism, agriculture, forest products, energy and local government interests in Oregon, Washington, Idaho and northern California.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide the perspective of the navigation community in the Northwest as it relates to the Columbia River Treaty.

Background on the Columbia Snake River System

Our nation's economy relies on a safe, efficient and cost-effective multi-modal transportation system. That system includes road, rail, air and water.

The Columbia Snake River System is a critical piece of the nation's water portfolio, providing benefits not just to the Pacific Northwest, but far into the heartland of our country. We are an export heavy system, and play an important role in balancing the nation's trade deficit. The Columbia River is the nation's number one gateway for the export of wheat and barley, and when you consider the movement of soy and other grains, our river system is the third largest grain export gateway in the world. We also lead the West Coast on wood exports and mineral bulk exports.

The Columbia Snake River System is essentially a river highway. It includes our 105-mile deep draft Columbia River channel from Astoria to Portland, Oregon. From there, a 360-mile inland

barging channel stretches from Portland, Oregon to Lewiston, Idaho, with a series of eight locks along the way. These are the highest lift locks in the United States, and are among the highest in the world, with the John Day lock topping out at 110 feet. There are also three large jetties at the Mouth of the Columbia, hundreds of pile dikes, and many other critical pieces of federal and port-owned infrastructure which ensure safe navigation and the free flow of trade.

Over 42 million tons of international trade moved on this waterway in 2010, valued at over $20 billion. A conservative estimate of the jobs directly tied to the deep draft navigation channel finds that 40,000 individuals rely on this waterway for their livelihood. This economic benefit is expected to increase in the future, supporting even more jobs as additional companies make use of the river system.

This waterway is a significant federal navigation infrastructure asset, and any potential changes which may impact its efficiency should be evaluated thoroughly. Substantial federal investments have been made in both the deep draft Lower Columbia River as well as the inland barging channel and locks. The most recent examples include the $200M Columbia River channel deepening project, $60M for three new downstream lock gates on the inland system, and significant Columbia River jetty repairs. A major rehabilitation of the Columbia River jetties is on the horizon, along with additional lock investments and ongoing annual maintenance dredging on the Lower Columbia and at the Mouth of the Columbia.

Columbia River Treaty Concerns

Despite the national significance of navigation on the Columbia Snake River System, the current Draft Regional Recommendation contains only two sentences devoted to this authorized purpose. The navigation community has repeatedly urged the Entity to recognize the connected nature of flood risk management, flows for ecosystem benefit, and the ability to provide the federally authorized navigation channel and river conditions which will allow for safe and reliable navigation.

Of particular concern is Section One in the “Domestic Matters to be Addressed Post-2013” section, which highlights the purported agreement by the Sovereign Review Team that “greater ecosystem flows” are desirable and should be examined. The note that “if a process is initiated, it will be a comprehensive approach, subject to public input, that addresses all opportunities to manage high flow events, including floodplain management, Columbia Basin reservoir operations, and strategic improvements to existing levees and the need for additional levees” leaves out any mention of impacts to navigation, and potential mitigation measures. This is a major oversight, and must be corrected.

Navigation stakeholders are most concerned with the assumption in the Draft Recommendation that existing spring and summer flows should be augmented through an expansion of present Treaty agreements. These augmented flows will increase shoaling which will, in turn, increase dredging costs. The document further posits that these increased flows would be accompanied by lower flows in the fall and winter. This will provide even less water over which to navigate these increased shoals. Navigation stakeholders have repeatedly expressed their concern with higher flows in the spring and summer, and lower flows in the fall and winter. Their concerns focus on both increased commercial handicap and decreased operational safety.

The “ecosystem flows” referred to throughout the Draft Recommendation are accompanied by no scientific explanation or reference. These suggested “ecosystem flows” may have significant impacts on navigation and navigation structures on the Columbia Snake River System.

Navigation stakeholders have had the opportunity to meet with U.S. Army Corps of Engineers staff and contractors to provide feedback, and to urge a more comprehensive evaluation of the potential impacts to navigation. We strongly encourage the U.S. Entity and Sovereign Review Team to take into further consideration the following concerns.

Potential Impacts to Federal Navigation Projects

When evaluating the costs and benefits to the federal government for any changes to current river operations, our membership strongly encourages the U.S. Entity to fully capture the potential costs to existing federal navigation programs. Of particular concern is the increased sedimentation that will inevitably occur on the Columbia Snake River System with an increase in spring and summer flows. The most recent example of the impact of high flows was experienced by the region in 2011. Within six months of the Columbia River channel deepening completion in November 2010, high river flows in 2011 resulted in severe shoaling that could not be adequately addressed by the level of funding provided to the Corps of Engineers' federal dredging program. As of October 2013, a consistently maintained 43' channel has still not been restored. We are concerned about the availability of funding to address similar shoaling events which may result from changes to river operations.

Stakeholders have additional concerns regarding potential impacts to other federal navigation infrastructure. The Columbia River pile dike system which helps guide the federal navigation channel and the movement of sediment is already in serious disrepair. This system would likely be undermined by higher flows that occur with greater frequency. Our membership is also very concerned about any potential weakening of the base of the Columbia River jetties, the rubble-mound structures that protect the entrance to the system from powerful Pacific storms. A seven-year, $257 million jetty rehab project will hopefully begin in 2014. Any impact to the jetty structures below the waterline would be devastating and costly to the ports and communities along the 465-mile Columbia/Snake river channel, and to a critical national transportation infrastructure investment.

Ability to Safely and Efficiently Navigate

The ability of Northwest businesses to compete in international markets relies on timely and cost-effective transportation of goods on the river. Higher flows that occur more frequently will also hinder safe navigation, as well as the efficiency of barging in the federal navigation channel. High flows reduce the number of barges that can be safely handled by a towboat in swift currents, including around the dams where spill operations may be in effect. Higher flows for longer periods of time will undermine the ability of barge operators to move full tows, which will impact shipments of Northwest agricultural products, petroleum, and all other cargo handled on the Columbia Snake River System. Detailed information from the Northwest towboat community has been provided to the Corps on this issue.

PNWA members are also concerned about the impact flows may have on deep-draft ship handling on the Lower Columbia River. Higher flows may impact vessel handling, transit time, and the ability to safely anchor. Additionally, lower flows will exacerbate the lack of available draft that is already occurring on the Lower Columbia River. Operating the river at a lower level for extended periods will have significant adverse impacts to the regional economy, and will reduce the ability of U.S. growers and manufacturers to compete in international markets.

While we realize the flows being modeled may be within the authorized operating ranges of storage projects, these flows will represent a significant departure from the historic highs and

lows anticipated by the navigation community on the river system. It is critical to assess the full economic impacts to each part of the river system before institutionalizing a new regime of higher high flows and lower low flows.

In earlier meetings with the U.S. Entity, navigation stakeholders have requested analysis of the potential impacts to the Corps' federal dredging program and other infrastructure, which are very likely to occur if changes to the current approach for managing spring high flows and fall low flows are pursued. We have reviewed this analysis, and noted that several of the flood control approaches being modeled by the U.S. Entity would result in an increased occurrence of flows which have historically presented significant challenges to safe navigation and the Corps' ability to maintain the deep draft Lower Columbia River navigation channel.

To date, the potential financial impacts to the Corps dredging program have not been evaluated. Given the significance of this navigation infrastructure to the Northwest and the nation, we feel it is critical to quantify how much additional federal funding will be required to maintain the deep draft Columbia River if changes are proposed to the current approach to managing flows on the river system. Failure to capture these increased costs would result in an incomplete picture of the burdens which would be shouldered by the U.S. taxpayer after 2024.

We have met several times with the U.S. Entity since autumn 2012. However, our participation has been limited, as the navigation community is not part of the Sovereign Review Team of federal agencies, states and tribes who are guiding development of the U.S. Entity recommendation. Greater stakeholder involvement in future Columbia River Treaty discussions and decision-making forums is essential to understanding comprehensive impacts to navigation.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I welcome any questions you may have.