

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on Fisheries Conservation, Wildlife and Oceans

Statement

SAVING SALMON AND THE DAMS

May 1999

The Northwest has a tremendous river system, the Snake and Columbia Rivers. Benton PUD supports the recovery of fish runs with common sense solutions, but we must strive to implement a plan that maintains a healthy environment for fish and wildlife species and also the people of the Northwest.

The Corp of Engineers is conducting a study looking into three alternatives for the key natural resource issue -- salmon. The first is to continue with the current management of the four dams and the mitigation measures already underway. The second is to look at modifying the current management practices to include new enhancements and facilities for the benefit of the salmon. The third concept is to bypass or destroy the four dams in an attempt to restore the river to its natural flow condition.

The breaching of the dams will cost millions of dollars. More importantly the impact to the region will be devastating to the people in our community.

There would be millions of dollars in electrical power lost from the cleanest, non-polluting power resource available. The four Lower Snake River dams targeted for breaching produce more power than is used in the entire states of Idaho and Montana. Approximately 75 percent of the Pacific Northwest's electricity is provided by Columbia and Snake River dams. Hydropower is renewable, plentiful and non-polluting. Hydropower revenues support fish, wildlife and other social programs.

Irrigated agriculture that produces more than \$10 million in products to meet both domestic and export food needs would be greatly reduced. Food processing would also be impacted by millions. About half of the 7.3 million acres of income-producing farmland and ranches in Idaho, Washington and Oregon are irrigated with water from the Columbia and Snake. Loss of the lower Snake River dams would push electric rates higher and reduce the economic viability of irrigated agriculture.

Barge transportation for agricultural products and other commodities would have to be replaced by an estimated additional 120,000 railcars or an equivalent of 700,000 semi trucks. A ton of commodity can move 514 miles by barge on one gallon of fuel compared to 59 miles by truck on one gallon of fuel. The lower Columbia River is the country's largest wheat gateway and the second largest grain corridor in the world, handling more than 13 million tons of wheat alone in 1997.

The change in river recreation would negatively impact the tourism industry and the quality of life. River-related recreational activities created by the dams' reservoirs add hundreds of millions of dollars to the regions' economy each year. Boating, water-skiing, fishing, swimming, camping and picnicking are just some of the recreational pursuits. In addition, no one is sure of the impact of the silt and sand that has built up behind the dams and what impact it would have as it washed downstream.

The Columbia Snake River Irrigators Association estimates the proposed Snake River drawdowns annual direct net costs to the region would likely range from \$230 to \$280 million based on data from the Bonneville Power Administration, Corp of Engineers, the Northwest Power Planning Council and others.

There is no assurance that destroying the dams will help the salmon runs, but there is no doubt the proposal to destroy the four dams on the Lower Snake River is a major threat to the Tri-Cities economy.

A sound, common sense solution is needed to save the salmon. Breaching the dams is an untested idea with much uncertainty among experts as to whether it would benefit the salmon at all. There have been numerous unfavorable conditions confronting the salmon for years. Change of climate, habitat, water quality, and hatchery practices is to name of few.

The Benton PUD Commissioners and staff work with various organizations, including the Northwest Public Power Council, the Washington PUD Association, and the Columbia Snake River Irrigators Association, to seek solutions. Alternatives to dam breaching can and will meet the needs of the salmon while maintaining the economic and environmental benefits of the river system.

Presented by: John A. Goldsbury

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TO: Subcommittee on Fisheries Conservation, Wildlife and Oceans

Subcommittee on Water and Power

FROM: John A. Goldsbury, Commissioner

Benton Public Utility District

RE: Statement recap for May 27th hearing

The recovery of fish runs needs a common sense solution. We need to strive to implement a plan that maintains a healthy environment for fish and wildlife and the people of the Northwest.

The breaching of the dams will cost millions of dollars and will not solve the problem. More important, the impact to the region will be devastating to the people of the northwest.

The attached contains some economic impact facts that are important considerations when discussing the breaching of the dams.

Alternatives to dam breaching can and will meet the needs of the salmon while maintaining the economic and environmental benefits of the river system.

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