

Testimony of
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Comments for June 6, 2005 Hearing in Clarkston, WA
Balance on the Columbia River system

Chairman Radanovich and Members of the Subcommittee, Thank you for inviting me to testify on this issue.

As Chairman of the Stevens County Board of County Commissioners, I represent over 40,000 citizens in the rural northeastern part of Washington. I am also speaking on behalf of the Eastern Washington Council of Governments comprised of commissioners from the 6 counties surrounding Lake Roosevelt on the mainstem of the Columbia River.

This region's over 400,000 residents, rely on the clean, renewable and low-cost energy that the Columbia and Snake Rivers provide. In addition, our rivers provide water reservoirs for irrigation, flood control measures, barge transportation, fisheries, recreation, and more. These are all part of an interdependent system.

Our region has long understood the delicate relationships between environmental factors, economic factors, and social factors that make up the fabric of our entire local ecosystem.

As County commissioners my colleagues and I are particularly sensitive to the interplay between environmental and economic issues on the ground where it most impacts people's lives. In addition to the daily business of running our respective county's, Commissioners from the Council of Governments are in the lead on regional planning efforts such as Watershed planning, Growth Management, which requires balancing economic development and the protection of Critical Areas for fish and wildlife habitat. Other examples include Subbasin planning; and salmon recovery efforts.

I am personally and deeply involved in many of these ongoing efforts, often on a daily basis. It is from that perspective that I express the same concerns I've heard from County commissioners throughout the northwestern United States have about maintaining a reasonable balance between economic, social and environmental interests. Collectively, we are deeply concerned that others (who will not be directly affected by proposed changes) are determined to re-engineer the very fabric of an entire region more to their liking, whether or not the people most affected agree with those proposed changes.

We believe strongly in the viability of the multiple uses we currently enjoy with the Columbia and Snake River systems.

This huge river system is the key to the economic production capacity of the region. We depend upon its stability to make our region viable.

The region's county commissioners are charged with the protection of the health and welfare of the citizens they represent. In northeastern Washington, the trend towards regional, state, and federal judicial management of local issues has threatened our very existence. For example, despite the attention and effort of local government, state agencies exercise dominant control over growth management and watershed management. As a result, counties are faced with dramatically increased cost of government, and dramatically reduced available services for our citizens. The cost of continual environmental litigation, is over-loading our county governments. Appointed officials and our courts continue to issue directives, codes, and laws, without adequate thought to their effect on our region's citizens, and without funding to adequately implement these programs at the local level.

We understand that any decisions about water use must be based upon consistent policies which provide adequate protection and certainty to agricultural, tribal, municipal, industrial and environmental interests. However, the best decision-making must include and consider input from the ground level – in this case, from the region's state and locally elected officials.

We do not want to see this important agricultural region become a litigious battlefield where federal judges run the rivers and the local voice is unheard.

We need to keep the Columbia and Snake River system as viable working rivers for all the region's residents, while using our best local expertise and scientific evidence to provide a balance between human economic needs and our natural resources. We understand that this balance must occur in order to provide protection for fish and clean, low-cost hydropower, transportation and irrigation for our region. But, we must not forget that our region's citizens have a vital role in management of these resources, and that our county governments are key to implementing and achieving the

desired outcome.