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Testimony
Before the Committee on Resources
United States House of Representatives

Oversight Hearing on "Keeping the Columbia/Snake a Working River System"

June 6, 2005

Introduction:

Jean Ryckman has 28 years of electric utility experience. She has worked for Franklin PUD for 25 years and began serving in her current capacity of Manager of the utility in January, 2004. Jean is currently Chairperson of the Coalition for Smart Salmon Recovery and president of the Board of Conservation and Renewable Energy Systems. She is also a participant in the BPA Power Function Review, Public Power Council, Pacific Northwest Utility Conference Committee, and Washington PUD Association. She serves on the Boards of United Way, Tri-Cities Visitor and Convention Bureau, and Pasco Chamber of Commerce. Ms. Ryckman is past-president of the Pasco School Board, past-chair of Columbia Basin College Advisory Committee, and past-chair of the WPUA System Design and Evaluation Committee.

Testimony:

Before commenting on the impact of the Endangered Species Act here on the Columbia and Snake River Hydrosystem, it is important to reiterate how crucial this multi-purpose river system is to all of us in the Northwest. It is no exaggeration to say it is the lifeblood of this region. One of the primary river system benefits that seems to be glossed over whenever the issue of salmon within the Endangered Species Act comes up is the impact on hydropower.

Hydropower is the world's leading renewable resource for generating electricity. This clean and affordable source of power continues to be the backbone of a strong Northwest economy, supplying half of our electricity. Hydropower helps improve the air we breathe, and reduces global warming because it does not pollute the air. Hydropower enables the development of the region's wind energy resource, because it can respond immediately to fluctuating energy demand and the intermittent nature of wind. Hydropower is reliable. Maintaining the flexibility of our hydrosystem is the surest way to maximize it as one of the region's greatest natural resources. It provides both environmental and societal benefits.

Dams are just one piece of the salmon recovery puzzle. Dam operators have made, and continue to make, enormous efforts and contributions – by changing river operations and improving facilities – to make improvements to the river system for salmon. As a result, in 2000, NOAA Science Center confirmed that survival of juvenile salmon passing through the river is as strong as it was before the four lower Snake River Dams were built. Salmon survival at dams has improved significantly. At most projects, well over 90% of the juvenile salmon safely pass the dams.

The salmon are a treasured symbol to all of us in the Northwest, and the good news is – they are not going extinct. Despite the gloom and doom messages you have been hearing about the health of our Northwest fish, NOAA Fisheries latest report shows that all ESA-listed salmon stocks have improved significantly since 2000. Snake River Fall Chinook increased by over 300% during that four year period resulting in longer fishing seasons and more fish throughout the Basin. Even this year's mysterious run of Spring Chinook is significantly improved from what we saw throughout much of the 1990's.

In our efforts to save salmon, we're largely missing the point. Most of the attention continues to be focused on dams, when the evidence shows that they are not the limiting factor. In fact, this year's strange Spring Chinook run tells us that there is a lot going on with these fish, and most of it happens out in the ocean where we can't see it, let alone control it. Juvenile salmon that migrate to the ocean any given year do not all return to the Columbia River at the same time. Some stay out in the ocean for 1 or 2 or 3 years. Last year, a huge number of jacks – or early returns – returned to the river. Typically this corresponds to a strong run the following year. The strong forecast for this year's return was based on the large number of jacks that returned last year. The fact that the number of fish we've seen is lower than we would expect tells us that something happened to them between last year and this year ...something in the ocean, when they were far removed from the Columbia River.

Salmon recovery will require a close look at all of the “H”s: Hatcheries, Harvest, Habitat, and yes, Hydropower and the dams. But a myopic focus on the dams and the costs some feel they should bear distracts us from the real things we can do to help the fish.

The salmon recovery effort is out of balance. Rather than relying on the Best Available Science it often seems to be guided by rhetoric and personally held beliefs - not evidence.

Electricity ratepayers fund the bulk of the effort and have a right to demand results. We must balance the needs of fish with the equally compelling needs of people. Pasco School District, in Franklin County, Washington, serves approximately 10,000 students. The school district paid, through its electric rates, \$155,000 toward salmon recovery efforts in 2004 and indications are that cost will be higher next year. The amount Pasco School Districts pays for salmon each year would provide new textbooks for one half of the students in that year.

Northwest power consumers, through Bonneville Power have invested over \$6.5 billion since 1978 in salmon recovery. It is ironic that it has fallen to the electricity consumers to demand biological justification for the expensive programs promoted by the salmon interests. There is no accountability from those asking for Bonneville money. Further, there is the assumption that our electric customers will fund every project that might help fish, whether it has anything to do with Bonneville's power production or not. BPA estimates that fish and wildlife costs will make up 28% of the Agency's revenue requirement in the next rate case ('07 to '09). School children, farmers, senior citizens, and every electric customer in the Northwest will bear these costs.

The ESA, as it exists, exposes conflicting goals in federal policy. An example: NOAA Fisheries, as part of the Dept. of Commerce, is responsible for promoting and allocating the salmon fishery for commercial purposes. That same agency is also responsible for protecting those ESA listed salmon. There continue to be expectations that the federal hydrosystem will make up for deficiencies in salmon returns or past policy decisions no matter where the responsibility should rightfully rest.

The ESA, as it exists, encourages endless litigation and allows our energy and money to be diverted to determining who is “right” rather than focusing on credible, science-based salmon protection efforts. Litigation consumes enormous amounts of time and money. Litigation can take operational decisions away from those who have the expertise, and hand it to litigants, as currently demonstrated in the case before Judge Redden. Litigants pursue political agendas rather than a balanced approach that recognizes the many uses and benefits of the river system

Conclusion:

BPA's customers and the people who pay through their power bills are committed to salmon recovery. Since we fund the bulk of the effort we believe it is appropriate for us to demand results.

Electricity rates in the Northwest are almost 50% higher than they were in 2001. BPA's commitments to fish and wildlife make up about a quarter of their total power costs and these costs are expected to grow.

We are frustrated because the context under which salmon decisions are made has not provided enough accountability or tools to measure success. As a consequence, electricity ratepayers end up with ever increasing costs, without corresponding clarity as to what their significant contributions to the effort are achieving.

BPA's customers will spend nearly \$700 million this year alone on salmon recovery, and at the end of the year, we will be unsure if we are any closer to reaching the region's mitigation goals.

Now more than ever we need to listen to the science, keep doing the things that are working, and look for other opportunities to make smart decisions that will enhance these beautiful, multi-use rivers, the inhabitants of the rivers, and the health of our region.

Jean Ryckman
Supporting Information for Testimony

Keeping the Columbia/Snake a Working River System
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1. Northwest Energy Supply

This chart shows the Northwest's dependence on clean, renewable hydropower. There is over 33,000 MW of hydropower capacity in the Northwest. This equates to almost 30 nuclear plants the size of the Columbia Generating Station,

or 75 coal plants the size of the Boardman facility, or over 130 – 249 MW capacity combustion turbine plants.

2. Fish Counts at Bonneville Dam 1938 – 2004

Adult salmon have been passing Bonneville Dam in record numbers for the past four years. This is a product of good ocean conditions and effective investments in the hydropower system.

3. 2005 Spring Chinook at Bonneville Dam

The 2005 adult return to Bonneville Dam is much less than the 10 year average, yet it is still significantly more than the returns of the early '90s.

4. Salmon Return Increases

From NOAA Fisheries, a look at improvements in fish returns by species. This again demonstrates that fish returns have improved significantly in the past few years.

5. Total Fish and Wildlife Spending 1978-2004

Bonneville Power Administration is spending more than \$600 million per year on fish and wildlife mitigation. This includes the cost of the Northwest Power & Conservation Council's Fish and Wildlife Program and the cost of operating the river for fish.

6. BPA's Total Fish & Wildlife Program: Total Annual Average Cost

This chart of BPA's estimate for fish and wildlife costs for the 2007-2009 rate period demonstrates that fish mitigation costs are projected to continue to climb.

7. Regional Impacts of Plaintiff's Proposal 5/19/05

This 2-page summary was provided by the Federal Caucus www.salmonrecovery.gov. This is a summary of the potential impacts of the Plaintiff's proposal for a preliminary injunction regarding the 2004 Biological Opinion.