

**Field Hearing before the
Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries
of the
House Natural Resources Committee
United States House of Representatives**

**“The Northwest at risk: the environmentalist’s effort to destroy navigation, transportation,
and access to reliable power”**

Richland, Washington

June 26, 2023

**Prepared Statement of Scott Corbitt
General Manager
Port of Lewiston**

Good afternoon, Chairman Bentz and distinguished Members of the House of Representatives. My name is Scott Corbitt and I am the General Manager of the Port of Lewiston in Lewiston, Idaho. I appreciate the invitation to testify today before the Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries about the importance of the Snake River dams to our community. I welcome the opportunity to provide comments on this critical issue.

For those of you not familiar, Lewiston is at the inland end of Marine Highway M-84, the transportation corridor that runs from Lewiston down the Snake and Columbia Rivers to the Pacific Ocean. Our home is at the confluence of the Clearwater and Snake Rivers, and we are blessed by the benefits that both these rivers provide the Lewis Clark Valley.

For situational awareness, the Port of Lewiston is in Nez Perce County, Idaho and is the furthest inland port on the West Coast. We are also Idaho’s only seaport which helps support the largest community closest to the Lower Granite Dam and pool, the City of Lewiston.

The culture, business and lifestyle of Lewiston revolve around the Clearwater and Snake rivers and the slack water, or pool created by the Lower Snake River Dams (LSRD). That pool has developed opportunities for the Lewis Clark Valley that now serve as the lifeblood and supports an economy for around 65,000 people.

At the Port of Lewiston, we transport tens of millions of bushels of the finest wheat down the river to help feed the world. As you know, the LSRD include significant lock systems that allow for the navigation of barge transport. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the

volumes of grain transported along the Snake and Columbia River system make it the third largest grain export corridor in the world.¹

One of the Port of Lewiston's most river-dependent tenants, the Lewis Clark Terminal (LCT), loads approximately two hundred barges per year or around 24,000,000 bushels of wheat annually in our valley. As a cooperative, LCT represents 3,000 farms and farm families in the region. Not only do these families depend on barge transport for their livelihoods, if river transport did not exist, it would take at least 25,000 trucks a year to move just LCT's grain to the Tri-Cities, all on largely two-lane, curved, and unsafe highways.² Truck transport would drive up costs for farmers and likely result in significant health and environmental impacts to small communities along key roadways. No attention has been given to this potential environmental justice issue.

The LSRD have also provided other economic development opportunities for the Port of Lewiston including bringing raw materials from the forests in the West for river transport to Lewiston. Our manufacturing leaders have come to rely on the rivers and dams for passage of these and other goods, such as high, wide, and heavy loads like wind turbines and their blades. The return of container on barge shipping appears promising for the near future. The growth of river-based commerce at the Port of Lewiston is imminent and is reliant on the preservation of the LSRD.

The U.S. Department of Transportation and the Maritime Administration (MARAD) recognizes the value of Marine Highway M-84 and its future potential and recently helped coordinate a conference in our region regarding the expansion of services along the river. We heard at the river conference that MARAD is in full support for growing commerce on the Columbia and Snake River system and that the economic development possibilities existing along Marine Highway M-84 represent growth potential for hundreds of thousands of people, many from disadvantaged and underserved populations.

In addition to the expanded manufacturing and barging potential for our region, the LSRD support the expansion of the growing cruise industry that brings tens of thousands of tourists into the region annually, inserting millions of new dollars into our local economy. This is an expanding and exciting industry for our valley that represents enormous potential.

In fact, the Port of Lewiston and the State of Idaho have welcomed the cruise boat industry with the investment of a new dock where sailings are set to begin in the 2025 cruise season. Similarly, the Lewiston-Nez Perce County Airport is preparing for an influx of new visitors to enjoy these cruising opportunities, the Snake River canyon, and our region.

¹ [United States Department of Agriculture, Agriculture Marketing Service, "Barge Dashboard"](#)

² Letter to Senator Patty Murray & Governor Jay Inslee from Lewis Clark Terminal, June 23, 2022

Lewiston has also been affectionately labeled as the #1 place to live in America for outdoors people. Our folks spend free time on the water, whether it's kayaking around Chief Timothy Island, bass fishing at Hells Gate State Park, or paddle boarding in the Lower Granite pool. The dams give us a multitude of recreational opportunities on the rivers.

Our communities have invested in recreational infrastructure such as docks, boat launches, and parks, not only for our own use but to welcome visitors to our region.

Our community – which has a 15% poverty rate and per capita income of just over \$33,000 – is also serviced by member-owned Clearwater Power. Clearwater Power provides electricity for eleven counties in Washington, Idaho and Oregon and is a Bonneville Power Administration full requirements customer. This means our community is powered by the hydro generated at the Snake River dams, providing our residents with clean, reliable, and inexpensive energy.

Not often discussed during the debate over the future of the LSRD is the importance of the water table to communities that line the Snake River. In Lewiston, the water table created by the LSRD pool is critical as it allows for the continued safe operation of one of our largest employers, Clearwater Paper.

The water table also supports municipal water use, provides for wastewater treatment, and is a draw for new economic investment. In many cases, our communities have been able to deliver water without wells and treat wastewater without septic because of the established water table. These are all projects that incur significant local investment and approval from local, state, and federal jurisdictions.

For the Port of Lewiston, the business generated by barge transport and our other river-user tenants has afforded us other community opportunities. Because of these lines of business, the Port of Lewiston has been able to make additional investments in our community. One of our biggest successes is providing the expansion of broadband so that some of the poorest members of our region can attend school and work.

The Port has also been able to expand our industrial land for tenants that rely on the rivers system, helping create new jobs and economic opportunities in our region. These have all been brought to us by the LSRD.

I participated and spoke during one of the Council on Environmental Quality's listening sessions regarding the litigation over the Federal Columbia River System Operations. Most of the presenters at these sessions lived hundreds of miles away from my community and largely disregarded the extreme and severe ramifications dam removal would have on a place like

Lewiston and surrounding communities. They assure that the positive effects of the dams will be easily replaced and make no comments about potential negatives.

The comments made reminded me of what was promised to impacted timber communities when harvest was massively reduced and mills were shuttered in the 1990s. Again, folks from hundreds of miles away promised new tourism and recreation, educational opportunities, and economic development, many of which never, ever materialized.

In our case, we know what will happen if dams are breached. In 1992, a drawdown experiment was conducted in the Lower Granite pool. The result included stinking mud bogs, dead fish, and unusable marinas. What it also highlighted was the loss of barge traffic and the economic impact on our community. It laid bare that pool reduction leaves docks, boat launches, and parks deserted and abandoned. We learned quite quickly that the drawdown of the river would not support the communities and economy we had worked so hard to build.

What nobody disagrees with is that salmon are iconic and deserve our support. Where we disagree is what some call the “silver bullet,” the destruction of four dams and the communities and economies they have supported based on merely hope that salmon would return in record numbers. This hope, which the federal government admits is all it has, is not close to being enough.

Our community cannot survive on this kind of hope. We must survive on reality. We know all the things that would be lost with dam removal, but we do not truly know what we would gain. It’s a gamble on our future when there are so many other things we can do to support salmon – funding hatcheries, addressing predation, finding blocked areas that do not support fish and removing the obstruction, advancing ocean research and addressing climate change, habitat restoration, upgrading fish passage facilities, and finding levels of funding adequate to sustain our precious salmon.

You will recall that when built, these dams represented tremendous progress for our region - we gained clean power, expanded farming and agriculture opportunities, advanced one of the largest, big volume barging operations in the United States, and created recreation and economic development opportunities along a stretch of river that did not have much. While we continue working hard to mitigate for salmon, we cannot lose sight of all the progress we have made on the Snake River. It would be a shame to turn back the clock on all that progress.

My request is simple – that Congress and the federal government not ignore the people of the Lewis Clark Valley and all along Marine Highway M-84. Avoid ignoring the ramifications of breaching the LSRD on the people and communities that louder voices with financial resources and no connection seem happy to shutter.

To those of you who advocate for our communities, I cannot thank you enough. I appreciate the opportunity to participate today and am happy to answer any of your questions.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Scott Corbett', written over a faint, illegible background.

Scott Corbett
General Manager
Port of Lewiston