

## Board of County Commissioners BENTON COUNTY

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February 14, 2000

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers  
Walla Walla District  
201 N. Third Avenue  
Walla Walla, WA 99362-1876

Dear U.S. Army Corps of Engineers:

The Board of Benton County Commissioners offers the following comments on the draft Snake River Migration's Study EIS Federal Agency "ALL H" Review Process.

The Board of Benton County Commissioners vigorously opposes any attempts to remove/breach dams located on the Lower Snake or Columbia River system. Such a proposal would cripple our regional economy, which is highly dependent on hydropower production, transportation, recreation, and irrigated agriculture. Even worse, breaching of dams along the Columbia and Snake River would put thousands of lives and property at risk to severe floods.

We feel the federal government and agencies have overlooked a compelling story, which is told in The History of the Lower Snake River Development Controversy, Conflict & Compromise by Keith C. Petersen and Mary E. Reed. This book offers insightful comments on why the four Lower Snake River Dams were built. The building of these four dams brought the benefits of irrigation, increased recreation, flood control, navigation, and most of all, hydroelectricity.

The draft feasibility report/environmental statement includes appendices, a main report, and a summary. The entire document is approximately 4000 pages. The federal agencies' 10-year focus on river drawdown and dam breaching has impaired their credibility with the region's key stakeholders, misallocating staff resources and tens of millions of dollars that could have been used for meaningful salmon recovery actions.

1 The dams on the Snake and Columbia Rivers are the economic engines for the Columbia Basin Region, the State of Washington, and this Nation. Here are a few facts on the Columbia/Snake River Transportation System:

- The system has 36 ports (in three states) that serve 40 states.
- The Columbia/Snake River system handled over 40% of the U.S. wheat exported in 1997.
- 13.1 billion total dollars in waterborne cargo value was shipped in 1997, yielding \$723

million in business revenues and \$48 million in local taxes annually.

- If barge navigation were halted, the regional transportation system would be adversely impacted.

- 1
  - a. There would be a need for 120,000 additional rail cars (annually)
  - b. 700,000 new semi trucks would be impacting county and state roads annually, significantly increasing system wear at a time of limited budgets.
  - c. New storage facilities (grain) would have to be constructed, and transportation costs would increase while shipment efficiency would decrease.

- Concerns of the agriculture industry

- 2
  - a. Impairment of existing water rights
  - b. Decrease in property values
  - c. Groundwater depletion
  - d. A decrease in crop diversity and markets

- Quality of Life

- 3
  - a. Negative impact on parks and recreation facilities supported by dams
  - b. Reduction in wages (fewer jobs)
  - c. Air quality standard will not be met as a result of the switch to overland transport
  - d. Displacement of business and industry
  - e. Over 4000 jobs will be lost in Benton County due to the loss of irrigation water, resulting in lost agricultural production
  - f. Higher cost for electricity due to the loss of hydroelectric capacity at a time of pending electricity shortages

The most credible science does not show that dam breaching will have any measurable positive impact on salmon, while it certainly will have significant negative socioeconomic impacts in the entire region.

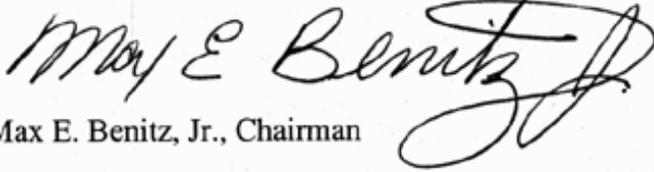
As an alternative, modifications to the dams can be made to improve fish passage. We support dam modifications and other cost-effective salmon recovery efforts. Taking dam removal/breaching off the table will allow the region to join together to focus on the more important issues of river governance, water and habitat improvement.

- 4 We would like to work with you to establish a more effective river governance approach that meaningfully involves all interests, including local governmental, economic, tribal, and environmental interest. A new Water Management Alternative for the Columbia River Basin (enclosed) would achieve all of the goals for salmon recovery without river drawdown or dam breaching.

At this time, the Board of Benton County Commissioners supports the Northwest Power Planning Council as the legitimate and appropriate authority to develop and recommend measures for regional salmon recovery.

Sincerely,

BOARD OF BENTON COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

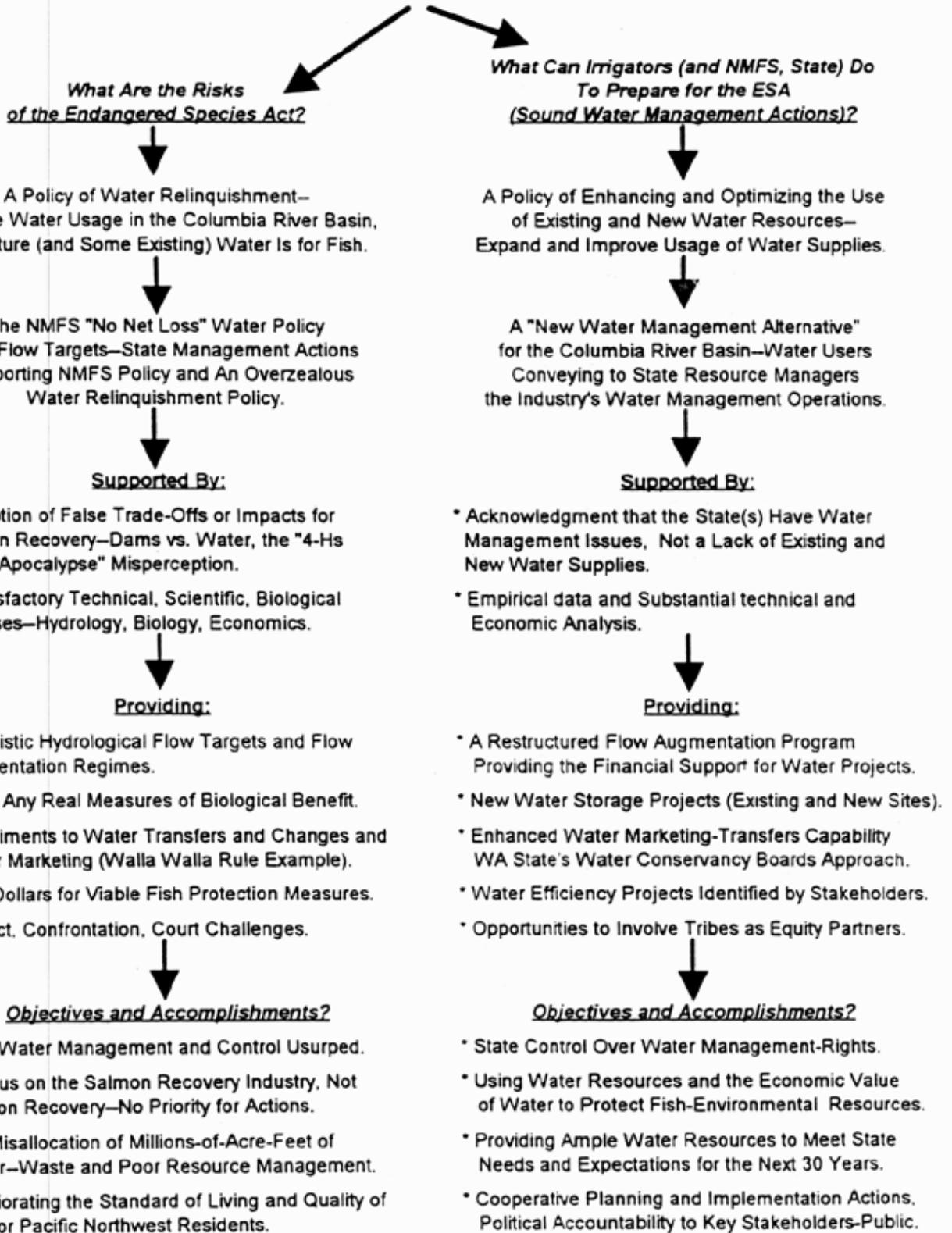
A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Max E. Benitz, Jr.". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned to the right of the typed name.

Max E. Benitz, Jr., Chairman

# "The Issue Is Water"

## Water Management Under the ESA

Two Approaches to Water Management Under the ESA—  
Which One Will We (Water Users, NMFS, States) Take?



4

Note: Presentation figure prepared by the Columbia-Snake River Irrigators Association, for the Washington State Horticulture Association 95th Annual Meeting, December 1999, Wenatchee, WA.

## A New Water Management Alternative for the Columbia River Basin

### *Water Management Will Be the Key to Future Resource Planning*

#### Flow Augmentation Program:

- > The existing flow augmentation program is restructured based on biological data and economic impacts. The goal is *optimization*.
- > The spring period flow augmentation regime is eliminated. The summer regime is limited to levels that approximate the summer period flow regime that was provided during 1994, a low water-year condition.
- > The impacts to Idaho from summer flow augmentation are limited; Upper Snake River Basin withdrawals would be less than under the NMFS 1995 BIOP; impacts to the Upper Columbia Basin (Montana) would be limited.
- > Changes to the existing flow augmentation program will create "new" revenues from the hydro power system—presently foregone revenues incurred by BPA.

#### 4 New Water Resources Projects for Watersheds and Tributaries:

- > Move water management for environmental needs off the mainstem system and into the watersheds and tributaries, to provide measurable results and real benefits.
- > Revenues (funding) provided by restructuring the flow augmentation program are used to develop new water resources projects in watersheds and the mainstem tributaries.
  - New Water Storage Projects and Applications.
  - Promotion of Water Transfers/Changes with Local Control.
  - Implementation of Selected Efficiency Measures.

#### Tribal Rights and Economic Development:

- > Tribal fishing rights are recognized and respected as legitimate *property rights*; recovery measures are implemented that improve or complement tribal rights.
- > The tribes are invited to participate in the develop of new water resources projects as *equity partners*. Funding resources gained from the restructured flow augmentation program are used for this purpose.

#### State and Private Water Rights, Economic Development:

- > State control over water rights and management is retained; private water rights are protected. Community social and economic needs are met through continued access to adequate water resources.