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Sent: Friday, March 17, 2000 8:18 AM
To: federalcaucus@bpa.gov
Subject: Comments on Federal Caucus All-H Paper

Idaho United for Fish and Water

March 17, 2000

Federal Caucus Comment Record
c/o Bonneville Power Administration
707 W. Main Street, Suite 500
Spokane, Washington 99201

Over the past 150 years, the Northwest has adopted policies and expended billions of dollars to develop the Columbia/Snake river system into one of the world's pre-eminent multipurpose resources. The benefits provided by this system—electric power, recreation, irrigation, navigation, and wildlife habitat—are part of the core of Idaho's multi-billion dollar economy.

For the past several decades, anadromous fish in the system have suffered dramatic declines. The economic benefits of healthy fisheries are well known, and the region is focused on finding and implementing ways to reverse these declines.

The members of Idaho United for Fish and Water recognize the importance of a regional recovery plan. Such a plan needs to encompass the following fundamentals:

There is no silver bullet or single action that will recover the Snake River salmon runs.

A recovery plan must include the entire life cycle of the species.

First priority should be given to actions that can be done immediately and have the most impact on recovery.

Recovery decisions must be made after consultation and collaboration with residents of the region in addition to the federal agencies, state fish and wildlife agencies, and the tribes. Even when carrying out the mandates of the Endangered Species Act, the federal agencies must recognize that they answer to the taxpayers.

A recovery plan must take into account the human element and must acknowledge that we cannot return the region's land base to pre-1850 conditions.

While computer modeling can be an important tool in formulating a recovery plan, it is important that models be based on the latest scientific data.

Substantially increasing flows of Idaho water and breaching dams are being considered as solutions to this problem. Neither is workable and either will have a irreversible, substantial, and catastrophic impact on the economy of the region.

There is no empirical scientific data which suggests that destroying the four Snake River dams can recover salmon runs above those dams let alone recover the Northwest and coastal runs that do not pass the lower Snake River dams.

The computer models used in the PATH analysis arrived at the breaching scenario by inventing the concept of delayed mortality to explain why

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smolts were surviving the journey in barges or in the river but were not returning as adults. There is no scientific justification for this assumption; in fact recent studies of smolt survival from Bonneville Dam to Astoria, Oregon seem to point in the exact opposite direction.

Research done by Idaho's Department of Water Resources using data rather than computer modeling and recent NMFS research has not shown a relationship between flow augmentation and survival of spring chinook.

A radical action like breaching four dams based on an unsupported assumption such as delayed mortality is not acceptable. Neither is the assumption that was used in early models that ocean conditions do not matter. Further study is proving even today that ocean conditions might be the biggest contributing factor to the decline of the salmon runs.

The people and resources of this region are too important to base recovery plans on guessing games or experimentation.

To this point all discussion has focused on breaching the four lower Snake River dams. The region needs to think outside the box. The focus should be on the biology of the fish and on how best to recover salmon runs, not how we can convince the public to destroy the dams.

For these reasons, Idaho United for Fish and Water opposes any option to increase flows of Idaho water or to breach any dams in the system.

We would support a balanced plan that would:

Continue to improve the passage through the hydrosystem, implementing measures such as surface bypass collectors.

Encourage innovative projects that are scientifically sound by providing research funds.

Eliminate most predation by terns and cormorants and other non-endangered species immediately.

Review the impact of endangered predators to find mitigation measures to reduce such predation.

Target actions based on local expertise and actions. We have ample evidence that one size does not fill all.

Focus on estuary improvements;

Acknowledge the true role of ocean conditions and continue to study the ocean life-cycle of the species. While we may not be able to change oceans conditions, understanding their role in the salmon life-cycle can help us avoid costly mistakes such as dam breaching that cannot contribute to the recovery of the species.

Use better selective harvest techniques to reduce mortality of threatened and endangered stock.

Revise hatchery practices so that they mimic natural processes. Include more work with in stream hatchboxes that could be used to increase the number of wild smolts in the rivers and streams. Special attention should be paid to those tributaries and streams which do not currently have a fish run to avoid competition with current wild stocks.

In conclusion, put reason and common sense above divisiveness and pseudo-science as we work together to recover our salmon.

John Barclay, Spokesman
Idaho United for Fish & Water

MEMBERSHIP & MISSION STATEMENT
IDAHO UNITED FOR FISH & WATER
Idaho Water Users Association
Idaho Wheat Commission

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Idaho Grain Producers
Idaho Association of Counties
Idaho Cattle Association
Idaho Association of Commerce and Industry
Idaho Consumer Owned Utilities Association
Utah Associated Municipal Power Systems
Idaho Farm Bureau Federation
Idaho State Grange
Idaho Women in Timber
Lewiston Chamber of Commerce
Idaho Sugarbeet Growers Association
Idaho Food Producers
Idaho Dairymen's Association
Idaho Co-op Council
Idaho Weed Control Association
South Idaho Chapter-Northwest Timber Workers Resource Council
Columbia Snake River Irrigators Association

Mission Statement

To preserve and restore Idaho's water resources, and to promote restoration of Idaho's anadromous fish runs.

It is far from guaranteed that breaching the four lower Snake River dams would save Idaho's anadromous fish. With prompt action by Congress and federal agencies, and without any litigation, the first dam could not be breached before 2008. This is well beyond the life expectancy of the runs. It is imperative that we do something feasible, now. We must unify the region behind a comprehensive plan to re-establish sustainable populations of Idaho's wild salmon and steelhead, and preserve Idaho's water resources.