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SALMON & DAMS

The argument is not whether or not to save salmon. The argument is over **how** we save the fish.

Salmon are part of Idaho's history and our heritage. However, at this point we Idahoans must ask ourselves "for whose benefit and at what cost" will we continue down this non- productive path, to conserve the salmon.

The Four Lower Snake River Dams are not located in the State of Idaho; yet Idaho has paid a tremendous price. The spill and augmentation of water threaten our irrigation reserves. Land use restrictions ignore the fact that Idaho has more than enough pristine habitat to accommodate the historic runs. Drawdown destroyed an entire ecosystem - domestic fish and wildlife - and devastated viable communities. All of these cost Idaho jobs and affect our Idaho tax base. What have we done for the salmon? **Experimental science does not work. We must use sound science!**

There are no "silver bullets" for the conservation of salmon, including dam breaching.

Breaching has captured center stage as a quick fix that provides an easy answer to a complex issue, "breach dams and save fish." The simplicity of that premise is easy to grasp, HOWEVER, just as Will Stihl, of National Marine Fisheries has said, "dams are not the silver bullet either."

We can only ask ourselves, "if the dams were totally responsible for the decline in salmon- then why are there sockeye in Lake Wenatchee?" This run traverses 8 or 9 dams.

Ten years ago, the scientific information said that 10 to 30% of salmon smolts survived the trip past the dams. Today, National Marine Fisheries Service, (NMFS) says that the survival rate is as high as it was in the 1960s and 1970s-before the Snake River dams were built. If survival through the reservoirs is as high

now as it was before the dams were built, returning to pre-dam conditions is not the answer.

If the goal is to save fish - not a debate of free-flowing rivers versus dammed rivers - then right now, not tomorrow or the next day, we must do the following;

- Vary dam operations and river uses to improve migration conditions;
- Continue to explore improvements to the transportation of smolts;
- Address all cumulative effects;
- Intensify reform of commercial fishing harvest, both domestic and international;
- Improve fish screening;
- Initiate directed flow to guide fish movement;
- Supplicate juvenile rearing channels;
- Modify hatchery operations;
- Address the effects of sport fishing and gill netting;

We must pursue technological alternatives that are scientifically sound and the Federal Government must do its job.

The federal government can not pass the "red face test" when it comes to re-establishing the fish runs.

As the legal process of the National Environmental Policy Act, NEPA, proceeds the government is mandated to consider the social/economic impacts. It is important to note that the purpose of NEPA is to protect the human environment while considering the rest of the environment. To date that certainly has not been the case.

Pursuant to the Endangered Species Act, a recovery plan for every endangered species must be formulated and must comply with NEPA. To date no such plan exists for salmon. Two biological opinions have been formulated but not one recovery plan - even though it is the law! Experimental dam breaching is not part of the ESA!

Agencies must consider "cumulative effects"- guess what hasn't been done! Even though it is the law!

Twenty-six (26) West Coast runs of salmon and steelhead are listed under the Endangered Species Act, (ESA), and another eight (8) are either candidates or proposed for listing. Of

these thirty-four (34) runs only four of these pass the Snake River dams.

There are still many unknown effects of climate and conditions in the estuary and ocean. There is still a great deal that is not understood about survival through the river system and the region needs to understand more before making decisions that affect our natural resources and way of life.

The 4-H paper had an admirable inception. The goal was simple - save salmon and initiate discussion. However, it should have been the "5-H" to include the human environment. The document begins considering performance standards and goals. However, the goals outlined in the document are in conflict with each other! Here and now, some are using the document in an attempt to divide user groups. The perpetrators only goal is breach dams, once again the salmon is lost in the debate. It will not work - try again!

The Draft Environmental Impact Statement, (EIS) is too narrowly focused. It asks the wrong question. The question is not "should dams be breached." The question is "how do we save salmon."

Dam removal is described by some as a "silver bullet" in fish recovery efforts. The fact is, " the silver bullet" doesn't exist. Trying to find one only leads us into a debate where there are no winners - not the fish and not the environment or the people.

We need a shift away from debates that do nothing more than divide us!

Certainly, no reasonable person could support such a flawed process that

- Obliterates ecosystems now dependent on dams.
- Jeopardizes domestic fisheries and wildlife.
- Destroys community's current economic bases.
- Makes salmon subject to experimental dam breaching.

Flawed documents guarantee that third party lawsuits will debate the issue until salmon recovery is a moot issue --- the salmon will be extinct.

The complexities of the issues defy simplistic solutions. It is imperative that we do something feasible - now!

We must pursue technological alternatives that are scientifically sound. 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 and jobs.

Our salmon is important, it is part of our heritage. Every job in Idaho is important - from the Canadian border through Lewiston and Riggins - to the Nevada border. Every drop of water is important, it is Idaho water!

You can have not one drop of Idaho water, not one Idaho job, and not one land use restriction - not one! The Federal Government must do its job based on sound science!!!

Respectfully submitted,

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