

March 4, 2000

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Brigadier General Carl Strock
Department of the Army
Walla Walla District Corps of Engineers
201 North Third Avenue
Walla Walla, Washington 99362-1876

Attention: Lower Snake River Study

Dear General Strock,

If your car starts making noise, do you take it to the mechanic and tell him to pull the motor and over haul just four of the eight cylinders? Would you just do half a tune-up and hope it works? No; you start with a tune-up and go from there. This should be the same line to use on salmon recovery. Let us first do something about the Caspian Terns, the sea lions, gill nets, commercial fishing in the ocean, and look into the use of tail race's to help fish go around dams. According to the "Conservation of Columbia Basin Fish" pamphlet that you put out at the meetings; it says that ALL of the fish coming up the Columbia are either threatened or endangered. So if this is the case taking out only four of the dams and leaving the rest makes about as much sense as only doing half a tune-up. I believe that we should look at the ocean temperature, predators, commercial fishing, and gill nets before we do something that we cannot undo, and is not guaranteed to work.

The Juvenile Columbia and Snake River steelhead and salmon that migrate oceanward each year pause in the estuary where they undergo their final stages of adaptation to salt water. That makes them easy targets for colonies of Caspian terns and other shorebirds that established homes on the man-made islands beginning in about 1987. (Idaho Fish & Game Department's Fisheries Chief Virgil Moore) Studies estimate 17 million juvenile salmon were eaten by Rice Island terns in 1998. The Rice Island is a 230-acre man made island that is made from dredging. Since it is man made, can we not take the top off so the terns will have to go else where to nest? Nearby East Sand Island is home to about 6,500 pairs of double-crested cormorants. I am not against terns; but spending millions of dollars on salmon just to feed them to terns does not make sense. Biologist believes the birds gobble 15 percent to 20 percent of all juvenile salmon leaving the river.

Along with most other Northwesterners, we want to preserve the things we value most about living here -- a vital rural culture and strong regional economy capable of supporting families and communities for years to come. Dam breaching is not a "silver bullet"; River flow augmentation does not work. We want common-sense solution that really works.

We should do everything possible for fish by making fish passage as friendly as possible. The Corps' effort to collect fish and barge them down stream has resulted in a 98% fish passage survival rate. Work by the Corps in the last five years has significantly improved fish passage. For example, yearling Chinook and steelhead survival at each Columbia and Snake River hydroelectric project is at least 95%, according to current monitoring and evaluation. That is higher than in the 1960s. Bill Muir, a fisheries biologist and research expert with the National Marine Fisheries Service credited high survival rates to the many improvements to enhance fish passage. The number of salmon returning to the Snake River indicated things are improving -- even with the dams in place. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Annual Fish Passage Data indicates more than 4,000 spring/summer jack salmon were counted past Lower Granite Dam in 1999. This is 10 times more than what was counted in 1998 and 40 times the highest since the 1970s, when biologists first started keeping track. NMFS is projecting runs as high as 140,000 this year.

Consider some of the consequences of breaching. It will be putting nearly 750,000 more truck trips on the highway not only increases air pollution but will also increases the cost of moving our commodities. Thousands of diesel trucks and train cars would be needed to transport grain and other commodities now carried by barges to Portland. Pointing to a report in the Lower Snake River Juvenile Salmon Migration Feasibility Study (Technical Report), it states a significant impact on highway congestion in the Tri Cities. And that transportation of just the grain would require 370 truck per day on average. The result would be greatly increased highway traffic, air pollution and a significant impact on public safety: and the danger of spills into the river from train and traffic would greatly increase. Replacing the lost hydropower generation with natural gas turbines will result in millions of tons of carbon dioxide being released into the air helping accelerate global warming. Breaching the four dams will cut more than 3,000 megawatts of power out of the Pacific Northwest power supply. That is enough electricity to annually power 1.9 million homes.

Now lets look at the cost of breaching the dams.

First in your "Conservation of Columbia Basin Fish" pamphlet that you handed out at the hearing it state's "river drawdown would cause an increase in electricity rates throughout the Pacific Northwest of between 1.9 percent and 6.7 percent."

In addition, in your pamphlet it states that 25 bridge piers would need protection from erosion as would railroad and highway embankments. Huge quantities of rock would be required to stabilize these embankments. In addition, it states that an estimated 100 to 150 million cubic yards of sediment deposit behind the four dams. This will cost \$2 million. The cost of all engineering and construction activities required for Natural River drawdown is estimated to be \$ 1 Billion. From your web, site at www.usace.army.mil/html the following states that the infrastructure improvements costing from an estimated low of \$210 Million to a high of \$535 Million would need to be made. Loss to the Snake River by the cruise-ship industry would be the loss of approximately \$2.6 Million Annually to the Snake River area economy and as much as \$5 Million Annually to the region as a whole. Cost to shippers will increase with drawdown. The cost for just hauling the grain downriver represents an increase of 28 percent over the base case. Grain is shipped from Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, and North Dakota. Industry representatives state that handling costs for rail shipments are 40 percent higher than for barge shipments. Records indicate that 198 different vessels, owned by 21 individual companies, moved cargo within the Columbia and Snake River system during 1995. 7,835 trips were recorded involving 10.8 Million tons of commodities. Over 80 percent of the tonnage transported were agriculture commodities, paper/paperboard, wood material/products, and fuel oils.

I have also heard that the four dams in question have not been paid off for building them. If this is true, has the cost of paying off the dams been included in the cost analogy?

The Hew National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Data show that survival of fish through each dam is at least 95%. All of the Federal agencies have recognized that the biological effects of breaching the dams are not adequate to recover fish. The NMFS preliminary data shows that a balanced plan that includes estuary improvements, continued hydro passage improvements, and improved conditions in habitat, harvests and hatcheries hold the best hope for saving these fish. Breaching of the four lower Snake River dams is a desperate political attempt to hijack a deliberate federal and regional process. This process has been showing that there are many causes of salmon decline and

that dam breaching or other extreme measures, on their own, will not save fish. Hundreds of scientists, agencies and politicians cannot agree on the best strategy for salmon recovery programs. There is no consensus as to what to do and, despite claims to the contrary; no majority of any group favors one approach over another. Idaho has supplied more than 10 million acre-feet of water for flow augmentation in the past five years and it has resulted in no measurable benefit to salmon. Flow augmentation does not work. More than 95% of barged salmon smolts arrive alive at the mouth of the Columbia River.

We should also look at the HUMAN factor in all of this. I worked at a local sawmill in Grangeville Idaho, (about 70 south of Lewiston) the mill closed up because the environmentalist's keep locking up the forests. (Although a government study shows that, there are more trees in the federal and private forest now then when the Declaration of Independence was signed.) It put 120 people out of work. In a town of 3300 with a work base of the sawmill, Forest Service, and farming, it was promised a pick-up in recreation (a never ending "fix all") that never happened. There was a man that worked at the mill; he was an easygoing nice guy who never married. Of all of us that lost our jobs, he was the last one I would have guess that would have tried to commit suicide. Fortunately, he was found in time; but this show you how the human factor can come into play. Not only those that worked there but also the families; there was an increase in divorce, teenage pregnancy, and drug and alcohol abuse.

People believe that if the dams were never there that fish would be plentiful; but according to a study, the salmon would still be very small. Gerald R. Bouck, Ph.D. retired BPA/FWS/EPA 1 did a study of water temperature in the Columbia River (some people think that the dams cause the water to heat up). Hear are some exerts from his findings.

1 " To address the role of dams on heating, peak summer temperatures were compared in 1998 between the relatively undeveloped Frazer River (British Columbia) and the highly developed, but more southerly Columbia River."

"Maximum temperatures in 1998 will be compared between the Columbia and the Frazer Rivers."

"One can only wonder how well the salmon would have fared, if no dams had been constructed on the mainstream of the Columbia River. In this regard, salmon were nearly lost in several Alaskan Rivers, and on the Frazer River, all without the benefit of hydroelectric dams."

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"Conversely, fall Chinook smolts migrate in mid summer when water temperatures can range from 70-75 F. or higher, but they seem to be genetically adapted to this condition."

"The Frazer River should be much colder than the Columbia because the Frazer drains relatively undeveloped land, has no dams and is located a few hundred miles north of the Columbia River. Indeed, the Frazer was cooler, but its maximum temperature in 1998 was similar in time and level to the Columbia, and some of its salmon streams were even warmer. This indicates that the observed warming of the Frazer and the Columbia is more related to regional or perhaps global conditions, rather than local issues. There is much that could be learned by comparing the temperatures and salmon recovery programs between the Frazer and Columbia Rivers. These rivers are similar in many respects. For example, salmon were nearly extirpated (destroy) from the Frazer. The Frazer River should provide a compelling attraction to anyone concerned with pacific salmon and their counterparts in the Columbia Basin."

We know that river navigation is the least-cost, most fuel-efficient and least polluting mode of transportation for Northwest goods. Countries involved in the export trade of the region are Japan, China, Korea, and Taiwan, as well as other Pacific Rim countries. Our dams are vital link in our economy that we have, over the years, grown to depend on to put food on our table, deliver out goods to market, protect ourselves from drought and flood's, provide recreation opportunities, and bring electricity to our homes. We should be looking at gill nets, commercial fishing, seal lions, and the terns before taking out any dams.

Sincerely,



Don Wassmuth
1830 Birch Ave.
Lewiston, ID 83501