

TESTIMONY OF BRIAN MAROTZ
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

Public Hearing on Columbia River All-H Process
March 1, 2000
Outlaw Inn, Kalispell

This hearing goes beyond the important issue of the fate of the Snake River Dams. It also addresses Hydro operation throughout the Columbia, Habitat concerns, Hatcheries and Harvest. Local concerns revolve around the operation of Hungry Horse and Libby Dams. Hydro operation and available habitat in reservoirs and rivers downstream are inextricably linked.

Montana has repeatedly testified in favor of a balanced operation that benefits all Columbia River fish. To accomplish this, we urge the federal agencies to implement the Integrated Rule Curves, or IRCs, and sturgeon tiered flow approach. We also urge that the variable flow, or VARQ, strategy for system flood control developed by the Army Corps of Engineers be implemented as soon as possible. Remember that the Court requires the Federal agencies to consider the IRCs at every relevant stage of the decision making process which includes the all-H process.

1 These operating strategies protect resident fish species including endangered Kootenai white sturgeon and threatened bull trout, while providing benefits to listed anadromous species downstream. Specifically, VARQ allows dam operators to store more reservoir water during average and dryer years, so that spring flows can be augmented for sturgeon and salmon without impacting reservoir refill. Also, the IRC/VARQ operation causes the reservoirs to refill in more years, benefiting the reservoir and increasing the number of years in which water is available for summer flow augmentation for salmon. Drafting Libby and Hungry Horse Reservoirs more than ten feet is harmful to biological productivity the reservoirs, which contain some of the strongest metapopulations of bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout in existence. It is important that the release of reservoir storage is gradual, so that the river remains constant. Unnatural river fluctuations are especially harmful to the fish in the Flathead and Kootenai Rivers during the biologically productive summer and fall.

Our recommended operating strategy is sustainable from year to year and benefits fish throughout the Columbia Watershed.