

Department of the Army
Walla Walla District Corps of Engineers
Attention: Lower Snake River Study
201 North Third Avenue
Walla Walla, WA 99362-1876

Dear Sir or Madam:

As a resident of the Pacific Northwest, I would like to take this opportunity to comment on the recent studies regarding salmon recovery and the Federal Caucus public comment process. This issue is extremely important to me because my life and the lives of others that live in the Pacific Northwest are built around our remarkable rivers. The decisions that will be made over the next few months and years will directly affect me, my family and future generations.

I feel compelled to first comment on the public process. Many have felt that the process we were engaged in over the past couple of months was extremely unfair and portrayed as some sort of game or circus. Before the public meetings began, the region was assured that the process would be fair, a place for the public to gather information and provide comment on serious, complex issues, and that the process was NOT a referendum on the four lower Snake River dams. Yet it is clear that efforts to pack the hearings by those who want to breach the dams raises serious questions about the value and integrity of the hearings themselves.

This process is, or should be, about finding common sense solutions to our complex natural resource problems – including salmon. It is not about finding the rationale to do risky, drastic and unproven experiments like breaching dams or requiring massive flow augmentation.

I applaud the Federal Caucus for beginning to turn the debate away from win-lose solutions and dams versus fish to meaningful dialog that will result in a comprehensive recovery plan. The All-H Paper reminds us that there are a number of factors affecting our salmon resource and it will take addressing all of these to find a responsible solution. The All-H Paper begins to define goals and performance standards. It makes people accountable for their decisions and actions. The goals need work but at least they are a start. Ultimately, our goals need to be biologically based, measurable and balanced standards that are developed and applied across all stages of the life cycle. I don't think we can ignore factors like conditions in the ocean and estuary or the effect climate has on this problem either.

All these studies, with one exception, focus too heavily on the hydropower system when in reality, the hydropower system has been improved to the point of diminishing returns. And, it doesn't make sense to focus on the hydropower system as the main source of salmon decline when there are endangered fish populations in rivers without dams. There is much we don't know about other factors affecting the salmon lifecycle and we need to find answers before we even consider radical experiments like dismantling our hydropower system or requiring massive flow augmentation.

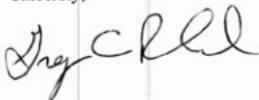
The John Day Drawdown study, on the other hand, recently concluded in the Phase I study results that drawdown would contribute little to the survival and recovery of listed Snake River fish. This conclusion was made as a result of sound biological findings and economic assessments.

I believe we need to consider the consequences of our decisions. It just doesn't make sense that we would remove hydroelectric dams at a time when our region is facing an energy shortage.

And, if we do, it is unrealistic and naïve to think we'll just conserve the energy lost or that we will replace it with other renewable energy forms. It is also naïve to ignore the fact that we'll be polluting the air with more railroad cars and more trucks on the highway in order to transport our commodities. This hydropower system provides many benefits that should not be ignored – an affordable and renewable energy supply, flood control, navigation, irrigation and recreational opportunities.

We are a nation of intelligent people and I believe we can get the science and answers we need before we make decisions that we may end up regretting. I encourage you to continue to move beyond debates that polarize the region and work toward a comprehensive solution that is reasonable, achievable and based on sound science. The All-H Paper is a good start. I appreciate the opportunity to provide comments and hope you will find these helpful.

Sincerely,



Potlatch

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