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WASHINGTON STATE LEGISLATURE

February 29, 2000

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

Federal Caucus Comment Record
c/o BPA-PL
707-W. Main Street, Suite 500
Spokane, WA 99205

To Whom It May Concern:

We, the undersigned, as duly elected state representatives of the state of Washington, wish to register our opposition to any alternatives that endorse the breaching of the four lower Snake River dams. In doing so, we would like to acknowledge the official positions of Washington State Governor Gary Locke and U.S. Senator Slade Gorton in opposition to the breaching of the dams.

We remain greatly concerned about the process that will be used to make a final decision on the Snake River dams. The alternative that is finally chosen to improve passage of juvenile salmon must be irrefutably grounded in science.

We believe there is much in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers draft Lower Snake River Juvenile Salmon Migration Feasibility Study/Environmental Impact Statement that substantiates our position against breaching. For instance, it was reported that with existing dam conditions, the average survival rate through all four dams and reservoirs on the lower Snake River already exceeds 80 percent for juvenile salmon, and 88 percent to 94 percent for adult salmon. This is the strongest evidence that dam breaching is unnecessary.

In addition, recent reports have revealed that fish survival rates for the lower Snake River are at least as good today as before the four lower dams were built. This casts serious doubts on the charges against these dams.

The Corps study also detailed the devastating economic and social effects that dam breaching would have on our region. We believe there is general agreement that dam breaching would:

- Increase the transportation costs for all agricultural commodities dependent on Snake River barges. Industry that relies on river barges to get its products to market will also face higher transportation costs.
- Impact irrigators who draw water to irrigate 35,000 acres of high-value farmland. This land grows enough food to feed 1 million people.
- Accelerate farm consolidations.
- Increase the exodus of young men and women from farming.
- Cause higher taxes or a cut in services in counties scrambling to find additional funds for county roads. Remember, most of these farm-to-market roads would be under increased pressure, with many experiencing a tripling in the amount of truck traffic.
- Make it more difficult for industry to compete. Eliminating the availability of low-cost hydropower will cause Northwest aluminum companies to pay roughly \$500,000 more a month in electricity bills. This will have a direct impact on thousands of energy-dependent family-wage jobs. Another example is Lewiston-based Potlatch Corporation. It employs 2,300 people in a town of 30,000. Modifying its water pumps would cost as much as \$54 million. Higher power and shipping costs would also cost the company an additional \$13 million a year.

A study done for the Washington State Legislative Transportation Committee estimated the costs to Washington state if the dams were breached. The study concluded:

- Weakened soils resulting from dam drawdowns may also weaken transportation infrastructure adjacent to the dams and reservoirs. Mitigation costs could be as high as \$192 million.
- The loss of barge traffic would cause an increase of 169,000 one-way truck trips per year on Eastern Washington's highways. This could cost the state as much as \$101 million for improvements and increased maintenance.
- Rail lines would handle an increase of 2.2 million annual tons a year. Infrastructure improvements to handle this increased load could cost as much as \$214 million.

An additional study is now under way to estimate the impact the dam breaching would have on local governments. It is anticipated that the cost to local governments would equal the cost impacts to the state.

Who will pay for the more than \$500 million worth of infrastructure improvements to the state's transportation system caused by the dam breaching? Our concern is the state's taxpayers would be saddled with this cost.

We also believe that the impact ocean conditions have on the regions' salmon runs must be more fully researched. It concerns us that no one really knows what is happening to fish after they pass the last dam during their out-migration to the ocean. Until scientists are able to quantify how many fish will survive and return under various options, we believe it is not prudent to seriously consider removal of any dams

This has been substantiated by Dr. David Welch of the Canadian Department of Fisheries and Oceans. He recently reported that there are "compelling reasons" to believe ocean conditions have a lot to do with the decline of spring and summer chinook in the Snake River.

We are also concerned about the environmental impacts dam breaching will have on our region. As elected state representatives, we are concerned about the overall health of the state's environment.

The elimination of clean hydro power and an important barge transportation waterway on the Snake River will diminish the region's air quality. Thousands of more trucks will be on our highways and more fossil fuels will be used to generate electricity.

Predation on the lower Columbia River kills millions of smolt that either survived dam passage or were a product of barging. The problems caused by Caspian Terns, California sea lions, Pacific harbor seals and other predators must be more aggressively addressed by the federal government. In 1998, terns alone are known to have eaten up to 25 percent of the 100 million Columbia River salmon smolts heading for the ocean.

We are equally concerned with the All-H Paper produced by the federal caucus consisting of nine federal agencies with jurisdiction in this region. We have two major concerns with this document.

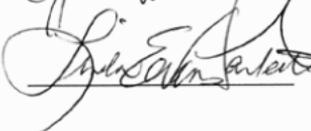
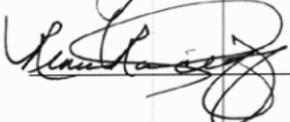
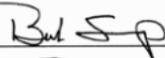
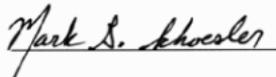
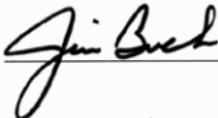
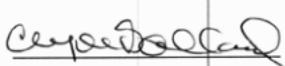
First, ocean conditions must be added to the careful review of habitat, hatcheries, harvest and hydropower. Credence must be given to those who charge that the impacts of natural cycles in ocean conditions far surpass the effects that are under human control. Specifically, over the last two decades, ocean conditions have been the worst in 500 years. Have these conditions played a more substantial role in depleting salmon populations than much of the habitat modifications that new regulations are focusing on? Until we know for certain, we are at risk of making a catastrophic mistake.

Second, the All-H Paper must include recovery goals or a targeted level for the number of fish returning that would equate to a full recovery. Establishing these goals after the federal agencies have determined what actions to take is unacceptable and scientifically unsound.

Over the past several years we have worked aggressively to implement locally based watershed planning groups to study water quantity and quality and to identify what is needed to protect healthy salmon runs and restore those that are in decline. These efforts include incentive-based programs to encourage the involvement of property owners.

We remain fully committed to the recovery of the region's threatened and endangered fish species, and look forward to continuing our discussions with you on how to best coordinate local, state and federal efforts.

Sincerely,



W. Mitchell	Gigi Talcott	Jim Linn
Jack Cairns	Gitty Lambert	Don Carlson
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