

March 6, 2000

Brigadier General Carl A. Strock  
Department of the Army  
Walla Walla District Corps of Engineers

Dear Brigadier General Strock,

For thousands of years Snake River spring and summer chinook salmon have returned to Idaho rivers and streams to spawn and die. In so doing, they have been an important source of food, inspiration, fertilization, and recreation to animals and humans. Chinook salmon link Idaho to the Pacific ocean and are an integral part of our river and mountain ecosystems.

Extinction of remaining threatened and endangered stocks of Snake River salmon is unacceptable to me. These fish contribute significant value and irreplaceable uniqueness to Idaho and their loss would be unexplainable to future generations.

I support breaching the four lower Snake River dams because it is the best way to halt the decline and begin restoration of wild Snake River spring and summer chinook salmon. My decision is based on several important facts. However, it is difficult to be entirely objective about saving wild salmon in Idaho. Science can determine if restoration of these fish is possible, however it will be our values that determine the nature, timing, and extent that salmon restoration occurs.

#### FACT

The effect of dam construction on Snake River salmon has been dramatic and scientifically documented. During the five years immediately after completion of the last dam in 1975, the annual return of spring and summer chinook salmon declined 40 percent

as compared to adult returns prior to construction of the first dam. The smolt-to-adult return rate also decreased systematically and significantly with the construction of each new dam. Most fishery professionals agree that the lower Snake River dams are the primary cause for the decline in numbers of returning adult wild spring and summer chinook salmon.

**FACT**

Attempts to halt the decline of returning adult salmon by barging and trucking smolts, installing and improving fish by-pass systems at each dam, and managing river water flows to improve and speed migration have failed. After more than 20 years of these and other efforts, the returns of adult wild salmon have continued to decline and the threat of extinction has increased dramatically.

**FACT**

No credible new strategies to increase survival of Snake River spring and summer chinook salmon smolts or improve the number of returning adults have been proposed.

**FACT**

Breaching the four lower Snake River dams is the choice of most fishery professionals for saving Snake River wild spring and summer chinook salmon. It is an aggressive, but necessary action. Several comprehensive investigations have concluded that restoring some level of pre-dam ecosystem function to the Snake River has the highest probability of achieving salmon recovery.

**FACT**

Cost to benefit analysis did not support construction of the lower Snake River dams. Congress did not authorize construction until political tensions during the Cold War created concern about the need to supply cheap electricity to the now-decommissioned

Hanford Nuclear Plant.

**FACT**

With the four dams in place, the lower Snake River does not meet existing water quality standards.

It is time we recognized the concerns many of our leaders expressed during planning and construction of these dams. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service noted "The lower Snake River dams collectively present the greatest threat to the maintenance of the Columbia River salmon populations of any project heretofore constructed or authorized". In 1974, even before Lower Granite Dam was operational, the Lewiston Morning Tribune wrote in an editorial about the already diminished returns of salmon "It seems to us another case of pushing a plan for economic gain without finding out first how much it was going to cost. Together with most of our fellow citizens, we now fear that those lower Snake River dams for which we campaigned so hard have cost us too much."

The right choice is to breach the dams. It is certain that segments of society will lose tangible benefits by removing the earthen portions of the dams. However, those benefits will be less than the gain our children and future generations will derive from an intact and functioning Snake River ecosystem. Robust stocks of wild Snake River spring and summer chinook salmon are an Idaho heritage and a national treasure.

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