

FLATHEAD JOINT BOARD OF CONTROL

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MAR 17 2000

March 16, 2000

U. S. Department of the Army
Walla Walla District Corps of Engineers
Attn: Lower Snake River Study
201 North Third Avenue
Walla Walla, Washington 99362-1876

Dear Sirs:

The Flathead Joint Board of Control (FJBC) is opposed to any action that results in the removal or abandonment of this country's power and irrigation infrastructure facilities. We firmly believe that the solution to the fish problems that have focused attention on the Snake River dams will be found in less drastic measures than their proposed removal. The dams are a vital contributor to commerce of northwestern states and the region's power supply. That role should be preserved.

The FJBC represents some 1,700 family farms in the Mission, Jocko and Camas valleys on the Flathead Indian Reservation in western Montana. Grain producers under the 127,000 acre Flathead Irrigation Project utilize the barge traffic that is made possible by the dams. While water from the Snake River joins that from the Flathead River in the Columbia below the dams in question, our power supply is augmented heavily by BPA power. Near ninety percent of the power distributed on the reservation by the Power division of the Flathead Project comes from BPA. The rest is from Kerr Dam on the Flathead River at the outlet of Flathead Lake.

We advocate the findings reported by Montana's eminent biologist, Dr. Jack Stanford, who has examined the state of the Columbia's fishery. He reports that the solution you seek has nothing to do with breaching dams. And it has nothing to do with pulling down Montana's reservoirs to increase downstream flows in what is termed a "fairy tale method of species restoration." Dr. Stanford found that many of these fish populations may well be functionally extinct already.

He points out that there are some fairly strong isolated salmon and steelhead populations and the best science recommends beginning with the strongest fish populations - like those of the Hanford area - and working out from there. The practical plan would aim efforts at specific stretches of river, restoring and enhancing habitat where those remaining populations exist and strengthen their numbers. Then by moving outward along the river corridors, that habitat and the fish populations it supports can be expanded.

A tremendous amount of study was involved in reaching that bottom line and several scientists reached that conclusion. It was determined that you just can't justify the expense of taking out the dams, so you'd better focus on where you can do some good.

Your decision should look beyond the hype being generated by the movement that is pushing billions of dollars toward breaching dams and deal with the real solutions. These dams may now only produce five percent of the power consumed in this large area, but it is still the cheapest power in the system and it is the cleanest. Their continued operation will save millions of dollars for the people in the Flathead.

It has been proven that the dams are not causing the real problems for the fish. But, if it will help to make adjustments in operating them, then do it. If some modifications in their construction are needed, then do that, but don't breach them and release all their trapped sediments down stream. Move forward, not backward.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Walter Schock".

Walter Schock
Chairman