



1330 21<sup>st</sup> Street - Heyburn, ID 83336 - Office: (208) 679-2222 - Fax: (208) 679-3333 - www.unitedelectric.org

Federal Caucus Comment Record  
c/o BPA - PL  
707 W. Main Street, Suite 500  
Spokane, WA 99201

March 15, 2000

Dear Sir or Madam:

As the General Manager of United Electric Co-op, Inc. in Heyburn, Idaho I would like to take the opportunity to comment on the recent studies of salmon recovery and the Federal Caucus public comment process. This issue directly impacts our 5000 consumer members who are farmers and business people in an agricultural economy. We in the Pacific Northwest look to the rivers as our life blood and must responsibly manage the rivers for the collective good of everyone. The upcoming decisions relative to the river will directly affect me and the other consumers of our utility, it will also profoundly impact future generations.

I must first make an observation relative to the public process. The hearings that have taken place throughout the Northwest have been tainted by the traveling displays and repeated rituals of bus loads of people who have turned the public process into a party atmosphere. Prior to the public meeting process we were assured that the hearing process would be fair. The process was turned from a place to gather comments on a critical and complex issue into a referendum on the four lower Snake River dams. Now, looking back on the process we must seriously question the value and integrity of the hearing themselves.

The process should be aimed at finding common sense solutions to a very complex issue dealing with our natural resource problems which include salmon. We cannot afford to take unproven drastic experimental steps like breaching dams or massive flow augmentation. Neither of these steps are scientifically proven or politically sustainable.

The Federal Caucus is to be complimented on redirecting the debate away from radical examples that focus us on dams versus fish to a forum that will lead to a well thought out comprehensive plan that promotes salmon and the Northwest economy. The All-H paper points out that many things affect our salmon and we must address a number of these in order to find the ultimate solution. The All-H Paper is a start at defining performance standards and setting attainable goals. These goals will need to have further refinement but are a wonderful step in the right direction. We desperately need to make people accountable for their decisions and actions, far too much money is being spent without accountability. Our goals need to be based on sound biological opinion, they need to be measurable and must be applied across all stages of the salmon's life cycle. We cannot ignore ocean conditions and the problems in the estuary or the

effects that the climate changes have on the salmon.

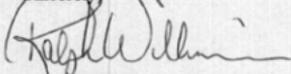
All of these studies, with one exception, focus too heavily on the hydropower system. The fact of the matter is that the hydropower system has been improved to the point that further improvements may help but will not have dramatic results. The hydropower system is not the primary reason for the decline of the salmon runs because salmon runs are also suffering in rivers that are unimpeded by dams. Yes, dams have posed a problem for salmon but a great deal has been done to alleviate those problems. There is much we don't know about other impacts on the salmon lifecycle and we need to find answers to these questions prior to even considering radical experiments like breaching or requiring massive flow augmentation. The Caspian Terns in the estuary are one place that significant improvements could be made without affecting any ones livelihood.

The John Day Drawdown study recently concluded in the Phase I study results that drawdown contributed little to the recovery and survival of the listed Snake River fish. This conclusion was a result of sound biological findings and economic assessments.

I firmly believe that we must measure carefully the finality of some of our decisions. It is beyond my imagination that we would consider taking out four of our most fish friendly dams when the region is facing an energy deficit. These dams produce more energy than the total output of our neighboring investor owned utility Idaho Power Company produces with all their hydro projects. Hydro is the cleanest and the most renewable resource we have. If we deprive ourselves of this energy source we must replace it with thermal energy that pose even greater environmental problems. This does not even take into account the pollution from the trains and truck required to move commodities from Northern Idaho and Eastern Washington down the Columbia River Gorge. One of the greatest assets of the Pacific Northwest is our affordable, renewable energy supply, flood control, navigation, irrigation and recreational benefits that our hydrosystem provides.

I hope that we are wise enough that we will make prudent decisions based on common sense and facts. We cannot afford to experiment with irreversible and unfounded solutions such as breaching. I encourage you to continue to move beyond debates that divide our region and work toward comprehensive solutions that are reasonable and achievable. You have made a good start with the All-H Paper. I appreciate this opportunity to comment and give input and hope you find it useful. Good luck in this regard.

Sincerely,



Ralph Williams  
General Manager