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March 30, 2000

Department of the Army  
Walla Walla District  
Corps of Engineers  
201 North Third Avenue  
Walla Walla, WA 99362

ATTENTION: Lower Snake River Study

These comments by the Tri-Cities Visitor and Convention Bureau are in response to the Draft of the Lower Snake River Juvenile Salmon Migration Feasibility Study and should be entered into any and all parts of the Corps of Engineer's review process regarding the breaching of the four Lower Snake River dams, including the Snake Dam Operations EIS, the draft "All H" paper of the Federal Caucus and the John Day Drawdown Phase I Study.

Please address any questions or concerns to me at (509) 735-8486.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "O.J. Lamont". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

O.J. Lamont, Vice-President  
Rivershore and Heritage Tourism



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### **3/20/00:TESTIMONY SUPPORTING STEPS TO SAVE SALMON AND SUSTAIN TOURISM WITHOUT BREACHING SNAKE RIVER DAMS**

My name is Kris Kelley Watkins. I serve as President and Chief Executive Officer of the Tri-Cities Visitor and Convention Bureau. We are a destination marketing/management organization representing the cities of Richland, Kennewick, Pasco, and West Richland, Benton and Franklin counties, the Port of Benton, Port of Kennewick and Port of Pasco and a membership of nearly 450 businesses working to develop tourism for economic diversification in the Tri-Cities. On behalf of that constituency, we thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.

**SCOPE OF COMMENTS:** My comments today address three areas of the December 1999 Draft of the Lower Snake River Juvenile Salmon Migration Feasibility Report/Environmental Impact Statement. These areas are the Effects on Recreation, the Effects on Economics and Social Resources and the Effects on Communities. The information regarding impacts on tourism and recreation presented in the Drawdown Regional Economic Workgroup report are woefully inadequate, inaccurate and demand refutation. We ask that our comments be made a part of the Snake Dam Operation EIS, the draft "All-H" paper of the Federal Caucus and the John Day Drawdown Phase I Study. We request that BPA-PL consider our comments as part of its review process.

**OVERVIEW:** The Tri-Cities Visitor and Convention Bureau supports the restoration of salmon runs in the Pacific Northwest through a balanced and responsible effort that considers the human equation and the economic impacts of such efforts. To that end, we strongly oppose actions under consideration in all administrative proceedings that would partially breach any of the Snake River dams. We oppose Option 4 of the Draft EIS. We oppose the alternatives or any combinations of actions under the "All-H" approach that include dam breaching. We oppose proceeding with Phase II of the John Day Drawdown Study.

The Tri-Cities Visitor and Convention Bureau is recognized as a progressive, professional organization whose programs emphasize the visitor industry for economic development and diversification. For thirty one years, we have worked to develop and sustain convention and sports marketing, leisure travel, wine-tourism, heritage tourism and rivershore enhancement in the region. The tourism industry, contingent on recreational opportunities associated with our rivers

employs 3,180 people and has an annual economic impact of \$187.2 million.<sup>1</sup> In 1999, nearly 92,000 visitors were booked into the Tri-Cities to attend conventions and group activities alone.<sup>2</sup> We know our efforts have a positive economic effect on our community and that breaching the four lower Snake River dams would have a devastating impact on tourism in our region.

Successful salmon recovery efforts require practical, cost effective strategies that build consensus and regional support. Therefore, we support habitat improvements for fish recovery, efforts to reduce predation, improvements for dam passage, investigation of ocean temperature and climate changes and we endorse options for the greater use of transportation of juvenile fish.

SUMMARY: My testimony reviews three areas where we encourage immediate action or more focused study:

EFFECTS ON RECREATION: The LSRJSMF Report's EIS states that breaching the four dams would change recreation activities. In fact, breaching would decimate the very recreational opportunities it purports would improve and eliminate others that were not ever considered for review. Alternative 4 claims that "new" activities such as drift boating, rafting, kayaking and jet boating, all recreational opportunities presently available on the river, could have a direct impact of \$82 million dollars annually on the region.

1 Travel impact and visitor volume figures supplied by Washington State Tourism indicate that \$149 per party of 2.7 is spent by leisure travelers per day in our state. In order to reach the \$82 million figure cited in the report, the Tri-Cities and the Columbia/Snake River region would have to lure and accommodate 4,084 visitors each and every day for an entire year! A total of over 1,490,909 people using only 33 developed recreational sites in just one year. Considering that the majority of travel and recreational opportunities occur during the peak months from May to September when the weather allows for such activities, projecting these figures over a five month period borders on the absurd and leaves professionals in the tourism industry shaking their heads in disbelief.

2 While the report projects an increase in river related recreational users if the dams are breached, it fails to consider the substantial losses and significant drop in tourism expected when a silt filled river encroaches into parks, boating and mooring facilities, eroding banks and destroying fish habitat and making the river an unpleasant, muddy mess for years to come.

3 It is unconscionable for the report to state that there would be little impact on recreation activities under Alternatives 1, 2 and 3 with the rivers in their present condition and the dams intact when substantial efforts, supported by Congressional legislation, are underway by eight jurisdictions to obtain local ownership of their shorelines and revitalize their economies through rivershore enhancement. Our eight jurisdictions have spent millions of dollars establishing the Tri-Cities and

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<sup>1</sup>Washington State Community Trade and Economic Development 1998 Report, Dean Runyun Associates

<sup>2</sup>Tri-Cities Visitor and Convention Bureau 1999 Convention and Sports Digest

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Mid-Columbia as a vibrant waterfront location offering year round golf, wine tourism, enhanced parks and trails, state of the art sports facilities, regional events and heritage experiences associated with the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial. Retaining the dams supports these programs resulting in a positive and substantial economic impact.

**EFFECTS ON ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RESOURCES:** The listing of "recreation benefits from increased fish runs and the shift to a free-flowing river" as a National Economic Development benefit without addressing the regional cost associated with the loss of jobs as a result is a facile attempt to disguise the direct, indirect and induced employment and income effects of breaching. Any temporary increase in jobs as a result of activities associated with breaching will be greatly offset and outweighed by enormous losses in agriculture, power production, barge navigation and tourism.

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Again, pinning hopes for economic success in tourism on recreational sport fishing and the water related activities of a "free flowing river" alone is a fictional scenario. If, as scientific evidence indicates, it will take at least twenty to forty years for post breaching river habitat to support even the fish runs we presently have, how will the tourism industry benefit in the interim from this free-flowing disaster? The numbers just don't add up.

The tourism industry in our region consists of more than the recreational use of rivers for fishing and boating or picnicking in parks. Tourism in the region is based on a multitude of factors that depend on the river system presently in place.

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Wineries, as an example, are a tourism draw only if they can produce high quality grapes and high quality wines. The majority of wineries are small, family owned operations. The financial impact of new pumps and irrigation systems would put many of the 80+ tourist friendly wineries in the region out of business. Just as the region is developing a reputation that rivals California's Napa Valley for great wine and a viable visitor industry, breaching would turn the vineyards to dust and a healthy and growing sector of the tourism economy would disappear.

As one of the most productive agricultural and food processing regions in the world, the area benefits from international group farm tours and a bounty of agricultural events and festivals linked to food and wine that bring visitors to the area. Pasco is the site of the largest open air fresh produce Farmer's Market in the state which supports many small businesses and has been the center of efforts to revitalize the downtown area.

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Sports marketing in the region is defined by the irrigated facilities that visitors come here to use such as golf courses and soccer, softball and baseball fields that host national tournaments and nationally recognized sporting events such as the Buy.com Tournament, formerly the Nike Golf Tour Championship. Re-engineering irrigation systems would add an exorbitant price tag to presently affordable costs. Each year the region also plays host to the national hydroplane race circuit which draws thousands of visitors to the rivershore in the very same park areas that would be severely impacted by erosion, silt and fluctuating water levels, jeopardizing our ability to host this event in the future.

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Meeting planners and convention delegates select the Mid-Columbia region for their conferences and meetings based on a criteria that includes image, accessibility and affordability. Those bookings mean "heads in beds" which generate hotel/motel tax revenues and delegate spending which translates into new dollars infused into the economy and sustainable jobs created through tourism. In the Tri-Cities, tourism is a rubber tire industry with the majority of travelers arriving by car. The traffic congestion resulting from increased truck and train traffic or higher costs for food and power production passed on by service providers, could easily create a reluctance to book in the Tri-Cities.

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EFFECTS ON COMMUNITIES: To state that the rural and economically distressed communities of the lower Snake River region "would likely adjust" to the physical and economic changes inflicted by breaching is an audacious and arrogant remark that places too much faith in too little information. To prophecy "net employment gains as a result of expected increases in recreation and tourism associated with a free-flowing river and increased fish runs" without stipulating how and where those infrastructure and development funds will materialize in an already distressed economy is sheer fabrication.

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Tourism does not just happen in rural and economically distressed communities where resources and investment are limited or nonexistent. It requires significant investment and active promotion. In those areas where traditional forms of economic support through agriculture, transportation or power production are displaced, communities will be hard pressed to develop tourism destinations or activities that will replace the jobs and dollars lost without huge investment and financial support from the state and federal government. This is unlikely to happen and, to be fair, the members of the Drawdown Regional Economic Workgroup should acknowledge this fact.

Reinventing the economic base of a community that has been economically devastated by the effects of breaching won't be cheap and it won't be easy. Ask the people in the lumber communities of the Pacific Northwest how they are "adjusting" to the misdirected, mismanaged and inappropriate measures that resulted from the bad science and bad environmental judgement regarding the spotted owl.

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In one respect the report's statement that "community size has been identified as a critical factor affecting its ability to adapt to change" is true. Size does matter and only those communities with the organization, professional expertise and unlimited resources to develop, manage and market new tourism programs will recover economically to any degree.

The widely supported and successful rivershore enhancement program in the Tri-Cities is an example of the kind of consistent, focused effort and funding that a tourism development program requires. Over the past ten years, our jurisdictions, our corporations and our residents have supported the Tri-Cities Visitor and Convention Bureau's efforts. Together, we have brought the Tri-Cities to the point where we are beginning to realize the economic benefits of an enhanced shoreline for tourism and a better quality of life. It is disheartening that all our efforts and all our plans will have been for nothing if the dams are breached. We will have to begin all over again, with more than a decade and millions of dollars wasted. This region, so critical to national security efforts in the past and still struggling with cleanup from the results of those efforts, deserves

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better from the federal government and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers than the incomplete science and voodoo economics associated with dam breaching for salmon recovery.

I thank you for this opportunity to testify.