APR 18 2000

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April 11, 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

Dear Sir or Madam:

As a resident of the Pacific Northwest, I would like to take this opportunity to comment on the recent studies regarding salmon recovery. This issue is extremely important to me because my life and the lives of others that live in the Pacific Northwest are built around our remarkable rivers. The decisions that will be made over the next few months and years will directly affect me, my family and future generations.

Before the public meetings began, the region was assured that the process would be fair, a place for citizens to gather information and provide comments on serious, complex issues, and that the process was NOT a referendum on breaching the four lower Snake River hydroelectric dams. Yet it is clear, efforts to pack the hearings by those with one goal – breach the dams – raises serious questions about the value and integrity of the hearings themselves. The results were theatrics and gamesmanship – activities that will not solve the problem. In fact, some members of the media feel compelled to continue the focus on attendance at the public hearings, implying that the numbers rather than science or making good public policy will ultimately influence the outcome.

This process is, or should be, about finding common solutions to our complex natural resource problems – including salmon. It is not about finding the rationale to do risky, drastic and unproven experiments like breaching dams or requiring massive flow augmentation. And, it is not about how many people attend or perform at a series of public hearings.

I oppose breaching the 4 hydroelectric dams on the lower Snake River. Our problem is much broader than the current debate of dams versus fish. Breaching dams is not the answer.

The recent studies continue to focus on hydropower when, in reality, the hydropower system has been improved to the point of diminishing returns. Survival is as high as it was in the 1960's and 1970s before the hydroelectric dams on the lower Snake River

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APR 18 2000

were built. Only 3 of the 26 West Coast runs of salmon and steelhead listed under the ESA pass these dams. There are endangered fish populations in rivers without dams. The Cumulative Risk Initiative, your own science, indicates that it is unlikely any of the alternatives alone, including dam breaching, will recover our fish populations. And, there is still much we don't know about other factors affecting the salmon lifecycle. Breaching these dams is obviously not the answer. Science and common sense just don't support this type of risky action and we need both if we intend to make good policy decisions.

I believe we also need to consider the consequences of our proposals before we make decisions we may regret. It just doesn't make sense that we would remove hydroelectric dams at a time when our region is facing an energy shortage. And, if we do, it is unrealistic and naïve to think we'll just conserve the energy lost or that we will replace it with other renewable energy forms. It is also naïve to ignore the fact that we'll be polluting the air with more railroad cars and more trucks on the highway in order to transport our commodities. This hydropower system provides many benefits that should not be ignored – an affordable and renewable energy supply, flood control, navigation, irrigation and recreational opportunities.

I encourage you to continue to move beyond debates that polarize the region, look beyond the theatrics that occurred at the public hearings, obtain and use good, credible science and work toward a comprehensive solution that is reasonable and achievable. Quit focusing on false solutions like dam breaching and massive flow augmentation that won't get results. I appreciate the opportunity to provide comments and hope you will find these helpful.

Becky Holce

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cc: Senator Ron Wyden
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