



APR 25 2000



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of the Outdoors

April 21, 2000

U.S. Army, Corps of Engineers
Walla Walla District
ATTN: Lower Snake River Study
201 North Third Avenue
Walla Walla, Washington 99362

Re: DEIS, Lower Snake River Study

Gentleman,

The Mountaineers is the oldest and one of the largest conservation and recreation organizations in Washington, with about 15,000 members. We have worked for the protection and preservation of salmon in the Columbia River and Snake River basins, as well as other areas of the State of Washington, for many years. We have watched the decline of salmon runs on the Columbia and Snake Rivers for more than twenty years as the Army Corps of Engineers, NMFS, EPA, BPA, and other agencies have squabbled over how to save the salmon and have spent hundreds of millions of dollars every year while the salmon continue to decline. In the judgment of most reputable scientists, salmon will continue to decline and will go extinct unless the Snake River is restored to a "run of the river" system. Therefore, we support removal of the four Lower Snake River dams.

The Corps' proposal to terminate further study of drawing down the reservoirs behind the dams is ill-conceived and just plain wrong. Lowering the river behind the dams and breaching the dams is the only way to restore the natural "run of the river" system which is essential for survival for salmon runs. Continuing to barge salmon around the dams insures the continued decline and eventual extinction of salmon. It is time to take decisive action while there are still salmon runs to protect and preserve.

It is noteworthy that Oregon Governor John Kitzhaber, Representative Mike Simpson (R-Idaho) and the Boise Idaho Statesman newspaper have all said that the current system must change and a run of the river system must be implemented. These are not wild-eyed environmentalists making these statements - these are well known, responsible, conservative decision makers and opinion leaders.

We concur with the Corps and NMFS that there are other reasons for the decline of salmon. Certainly modification of hatchery operations, targeted curtailment of harvest, and action to protect salmon habitat throughout the Columbia basin are all essential. However, action on these fronts does not eliminate the need for draw downs on the Snake and the Columbia Rivers.

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It is noteworthy that the four dams on the Snake River do not store water and provide zero flood control. These four dams provide less than 5% of the regional power supply, and this amount of power can be replaced by clean conservation and renewable energy sources.

We are sympathetic to the economic concerns of farmers who rely on water behind the dams for irrigation. However, the thirteen irrigation systems near the Ice Harbor Dam can be extended if the river level drops. This is an affordable and practical process and the cost of doing that would be substantially less than the amount spent on barging and other salmon efforts each year.

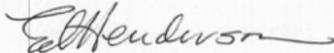
We are also sympathetic with the economic impact of eliminating barging on the lower Snake River. At present the barging industry has an unfair competitive advantage over truck and trains for transportation of agricultural products and other products from Central and Eastern Washington. The funds used to improve highways and railroads in the region will be of long term economic benefit to the entire region.

For these and many other reasons The Mountaineers supports Alternative 4, i.e. partial removal of the four Lower Snake River dams.

We look forward to hearing these concerns addressed in the final EIS.

Sincerely,

The Mountaineers



Edward M. Henderson, Jr.
President

EMH/klh