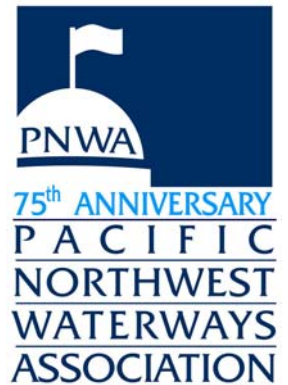


April 10, 2009



Dear Sir/Madam:

I write in response to the letter you recently sent to President Obama, calling for removal of the four dams on the Lower Snake River. The letter asserts that “federal agencies have attempted to circumvent this scientific consensus by failing to even consider dam removal.”

Northwest citizens and the scientific community are far from a consensus on breaching dams. Thirteen runs of fish in the Columbia Basin are listed under the ESA. Only four pass the Snake River dams. Removal of these dams will do nothing for the majority of the region’s listed fish, and it is not a silver bullet for the four runs that do migrate past those structures.

Major federal studies, including the Columbia River System Operations EIS, have rejected dam breaching for lack of benefit and very high economic and environmental costs. In the years since those studies, both juvenile fish survival and adult returns have increased dramatically, making breaching even less attractive.

Dam breach advocates say that as many as 90 percent of juvenile salmon die at the dams. That may have been true for three years back in the 1970s when the region experienced its lowest recorded flows ever, and long before fish passage improvements were implemented. However, spillway weirs and many other enhancements have since been installed at the dams. The result: adult returns have been at record levels since 2000. Today, fish passage survival is between 94 and 98 percent at each dam. System survival is higher today than it was before the last four dams were built.

The Northwest Power and Conservation Council (NPCC), Bonneville Power Administration (BPA), and the regional Integrated Resource Plan prepared by Northwest electric utilities have all forecasted increasing consumer demand for electricity, a limit to conservation benefits, and the need for a robust hydropower system to meet peak demand and to integrate wind, solar and other alternative energy sources. It would take 3 nuclear, 6 coal-fired, or 14 gas-fired power plants to provide the same peaking capacity as the four Snake River dams. Our region and the environment cannot afford to remove nearly 3,500 megawatts of carbon-free and emission-free peaking power.

(Continued)

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ph. 503-234-8550 • f. 503-234-8555 • 9115 SW Oleson Road • Suite 101 • Portland, OR 97223

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Dam breach advocates say that barge cargo can easily move to other modes. Unfortunately, rail is not available at many river and country grain elevators, and trucking is prohibitively expensive for many of the region's shippers. Furthermore, shifting from barge to other modes would be harmful to the environment. Navigation is the most fuel efficient and least polluting mode of transportation. A recent study demonstrated that barging can move each ton of cargo 576 miles on one gallon of fuel. That is 40 percent better than rail and 270 percent better than trucking. Each year, inland navigation keeps approximately 700,000 trucks off the highways of the Northwest.

Our membership is united in its support for the four Lower Snake River dams and navigation locks. Salmon and dams can coexist. We recognize the important role the dams play in the Northwest economy, and in meeting the nation's goals to reduce our carbon footprint. We respect the studies that have repeatedly demonstrated that breaching the dams would provide no positive impact for the salmon.

We believe the region is on the right track now. Earlier this week, we wrote to President Obama, urging him to support the Federal Columbia River Power System (FCRPS) Biological Opinion (BiOp), and the court-supervised collaboration of the federal, state and tribal governments. The collaboration is already bearing fruit. Historic tribal and state Fish Accords have been put into action to protect thousands of miles of tributary habitat. Our letter to the President is enclosed, as well as a listing of our member organizations.

I encourage you to contact my office if you have any questions regarding this issue. We would be more than happy to discuss why there is more than one side to this story.

Sincerely,



Glenn Vanselow
Executive Director

Enc: PNWA letter to President Obama (April 7, 2009)
PNWA membership