

It's time to stop debating and focus on rebuilding fish runs

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This region has spent many millions of dollars and decades of delay trying to appease a small minority of interests who want to breach the dams. This ongoing debate which persists with the 2008 BiOp lawsuit, is continuing to divert the focus from hands-on fish recovery efforts to debates in the courtroom.

Twenty years ago when these debates first began I was a member of Senator Hatfield's Salmon Summit. Senator Hatfield called the federal agencies, states, Tribes, environmental and economic interests together in 1989 in response to the first ESA listing petitions. He did the right thing at the time. He tried to bring all interests together to find common ground and solve the problem before the fish were listed. The first meeting of that forum held great promise as the Senator asked the participants, one by one, "Are you committed to working together to solve this problem?" "Yes, Senator," was each person's response.

However, as soon as Senator Hatfield left the room, the abundant media present provided a golden opportunity for parties to solidify their positions, dig in their heels and stage media events to promote their views. The Salmon Summit turned into a media circus where far more energy was devoted to press conferences, parades, and demonstrations featuring people in salmon costumes than discussing salmon science or seeking common ground.

After twenty years, one thing is certain. We will never get 100 percent of the people to agree, for or against, on dam breaching. A small minority of interests want to continue the debate. They continue to seek new forums where they can promote their goal.

The region's job is not to make everybody happy or to provide endless forums to promote minority views. Its job is to do what is necessary to rebuild endangered fish runs. We have a Biological Opinion that is designed to do that. This BiOp is the product of an unprecedented collaboration among the scientists and fish managers from the federal government, Northwest Tribes and the Northwest states. We believe the BiOp will stand up under rigorous scientific scrutiny. The BiOp provides more funding, more actions, more certainty, more cooperation and more promise for rebuilding fish runs than this region has ever seen.

This BiOp is supported by a majority of the treaty Tribes, a majority of the non-Treaty tribes, and a majority of the states. The dams, with their abundant carbon-free energy and environmentally friendly transportation, are supported by a vast majority of the Northwest Congressional delegation and a vast majority of the Northwest population.

Now is the time to end the debate, get out of the courtroom, get behind the BiOp, and focus the region's attention on the on-the-ground recovery actions that will rebuild the fish runs.

Glenn Vanselow

Executive Director, Pacific Northwest Waterways Association

9115 SW Oleson Road, Suite 101, Portland, OR 97223

503-234-8551, glenn.vanselow@pnwa.net

About PNWA. For 75 years, PNWA has been the regional leader in working with the U.S. Congress, federal agencies and regional decision makers on federal policy in support of transportation, trade, economic development and environmental sustainability in the Pacific Northwest. . PNWA represents multiple industries in the public and private sectors in Washington, Oregon, Idaho and California. Members include public ports, navigation, transportation, international trade, agriculture, forest products, energy and governmental interests. You can learn more about PNWA at www.pnwa.net.

