

Guest Opinion: Removing dams not the solution to fish kills

BY DAVID DOERINGSFELD

August 13, 2015

It's been a hot summer here in the Northwest and the strain on the region is apparent with the drought declarations in Washington and Oregon and the near record temperatures all across the region. The unseasonably warm winter didn't renew the snowpack in the mountains, which resulted in lower river levels and warmer water. That warm water is proving deadly to migrating cold water fish and will likely have a severe impact on this year's salmon populations.

After 20 years of investments and improvements to fish management on the Columbia and Snake rivers, it is disheartening to see reports that something so far out of human control is having such an adverse impact on our recovering fish populations. However, it is important to maintain perspective on this issue, despite grandstanding by extremist environmental groups.

Most important to keep in mind is that the hot weather driving this phenomenon is completely unrelated to the Snake River dams. In fact, water temperature in the Salmon River (an undammed river) at [White Bird](#) has been much higher this summer than water temperatures at [Lower Granite Dam](#) the uppermost dam on the lower Snake River that salmon and steelhead pass on their return to Idaho waters. This is due in part to the release of cold water stored behind Dworshak Dam each year for the express purpose of boosting river flows and cooling the Snake River. This release of cool water helps enable salmon and steelhead to survive during hot summer days when river temperatures can climb to near lethal levels.

Record salmon and steelhead returns demonstrate the success we've seen from fish passage improvements made over the past 20 years. Improvements to fish bypass systems and the addition of surface passage structures at the Snake River dams have greatly reduced the impacts dams have on migrating salmon. Commentators calling for removal of the Snake River dams fail to mention that the hot temperatures have had an adverse effect on all the rivers and tributaries in the region, not just the ones with dams.

One bad year will not reverse the extraordinary efforts undertaken by Bonneville Power Administration, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Bureau of Reclamation, the tribes, utilities and many others who are collaborating to ensure our treasured salmon populations continue to increase. Removing the Snake River dams will do nothing to lower water temperatures during future heat spells.

David Doeringsfeld is the general manager of the Port of Lewiston.