

## Opinion

### New bill targets dam removal

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By: Congressman Doc Hastings

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This month a bill was introduced in Congress calling for another round of expensive studies on tearing out the Snake River dams.

The vast majority of congressmen supporting this attack on our dams don't even live in the Pacific Northwest - over half are from east of the Mississippi. Either they don't understand the impact dam breaching would have on our communities - or they simply don't care.

Supporters of the so called "Salmon Economic Analysis and Planning Act," who have been advocating a dam busting agenda for years, claim that this time it's different - that this new proposal doesn't endorse dam-breaching. However, a quick read of the bill leaves no doubt that dam removal is the target of this misguided legislation.

Removal of the Snake River dams has already been studied extensively and rejected by both the Clinton and Bush Administrations. Even so, radical environmentalists want taxpayers to fund study after study until they get the results they want.

A complete and legitimate study will never conclude that dam removal is beneficial to central Washington. Why else would this latest plan focus solely on fish in the Snake River and Columbia River Basin - and ignore other endangered fish runs up and down the West Coast? Why do they single out removal of the lower Snake River dams - despite the fact that only 4 of the 26 listed salmon species even pass through the Snake River?

Only dam removal - and no other recovery strategy - is to be compared against existing policies under the bill. In fact, one of the stated purposes of the bill is to "maximize the potential benefits from potential dam removal." Returning salmon to "harvestable levels," a standard far above what the Endangered Species Act requires, is another purpose of the bill. In other words, spend billions to tear out our dams so that these endangered fish can be caught and eaten.

It insinuates that the lower Snake River dams are responsible for salmon decline - without making the same connection between other factors that we know impact salmon such as ocean conditions, fishing, predation and the urbanization of historic salmon habitat.

Finally, the "Salmon Economic Analysis and Planning Act" fails to note the substantial progress we are making on salmon recovery. Salmon returns in the Pacific Northwest have rebounded to record levels in recent years in response to major regional investments in habitat improvements as well as changing ocean conditions. We are all committed to salmon recovery - but reopening a divisive dam debate is something I will oppose at every turn.