

Idaho Statesman

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Reader's View: Salmon and hydroelectricity both are resources worth saving

In a world where the escalation of pollution from energy production and consumption is literally choking our planet to death, hydroelectricity becomes an extremely valuable natural resource. Idaho enjoys an abundance of this energy source (highest per capita nationwide). It not only helps to keep Idaho's air clean, it helps the entire planet and keeps our power bills among the lowest in the nation. It's a resource that many of us take for granted because often times we never realize what we've got until it's gone.

I'm a fourth-generation Idahoan. I've enjoyed fishing for our salmon and steelhead for over 30 years. Like many Idahoans, I'm passionate about the sport and our magnificent anadromous fish runs. However, emotions can sometimes skew sound judgment. Salmon and hydroelectricity are both valuable natural resources that need to be preserved.

The self-defeating mindset being perpetuated by the Idaho Statesman (see editorial opinion, Sept. 8) and a handful of aging fishery biologists suggests that hydroelectricity and salmon are mutually exclusive of each other - we can't have both. To support this contention, the Statesman's article uses consecutive annual salmon return numbers to establish a "trend," starting at year 2001. Excuse me. Our salmon return of 2001 was the largest in recorded history. The four Snake River dams the Statesman wants to see breached had been in place for over 30 years.

If anything, the record salmon returns of 2001 provided irrefutable evidence that dams are only one of many factors that impact our migratory fish runs. If you're going to use consecutive salmon return numbers to establish an accurate trend, start at the beginning - when the lower Snake dams were built (the '70s). Salmon numbers took a nose-dive in the mid '70s, but overall have rebounded since then - with both good years and bad.

Another very telling piece of information: Salmon numbers on coastal rivers without dams have been down the past few years (right along with ours) indicating an oceanic downturn, over-harvesting, massive illegal gill-netting on the high seas or any number of variables that effect these fish. Commercial coastal fishing was closed this past year due to low numbers.

We need to start with the premise that both salmon and hydroelectricity are equal in value and therefore worth preserving and proliferating. A dam-breaching mentality demonstrates a total lack of vision - a giant step backwards.

When visionary President JFK got together with the combined talent of NASA (along with the support of this entire nation) and committed to the ambitious goal of putting a man on the moon before the Soviet Union did (think Cold War era), we literally made the "impossible" a reality in a few short years.

Toward the end of World War II, allied intelligence informed our leaders that German technology was getting close to developing a catastrophic (atomic) bomb. The race was on; the survival of the free world hung in the balance. We had no option except to develop atomic bomb technology before Nazi Germany did. Again, America brought our best talent and all the necessary resources together in a concerted "fever-pitch" effort to beat the Germans, succeeding in the development of hyper-advanced technology in months that literally saved the world.

When America puts its collective mind to accomplishing an important specific goal, past history has demonstrated that we have the capacity to develop cutting-edge solutions that previously seemed impossible. We can save our magnificent salmon and our clean, inexpensive hydroelectricity - but it's going to take vision, co-operation and funding. Without a full commitment, the odds are high that we will lose our ocean-run salmonids. The implications of successful fish-passage technology are much bigger than Idaho's salmon and hydroelectricity alone. People and migratory fish the world over (indeed the entire planet itself) stand to benefit.

Michael F. Howard is an avid outdoorsman who spends most of his energy promoting his patented instructional fishing game "SPRING TROUT" (see at www.jcg.com/game/files/)