



Time to Move On and Help Salmon

As welcome as the spring freshet, we see signs of a potential thaw in the litigation that has been ongoing since 2000 over how the federal hydro system should be operated to help listed salmon and steelhead. Judge Redden sent encouraging signs and told the court room “we’re very close” in getting to an acceptable long-term salmon plan in remarks on March 6th.

The judge still has concerns about the estuary and whether there is sufficient funding to assure all habitat measures can be accomplished. But the federal agencies will address those issues and discuss options with the judge April 2. We hope their presentation allays any lingering doubts about the sufficiency of the Biological Opinion (BiOp) and paves the way out of the courtroom.



RiverPartners would rather see investment in on-the-ground actions to directly benefit fish than continued litigation. Fish don’t swim in the courtroom and won’t spawn in greater numbers because of clever tactics or well-written briefs. While it isn’t perfect, we believe the BiOp will increase salmon survival and lead toward recovery.

Our support means our constituents will swallow a hefty price tag. The BiOp and the Columbia Basin Accords with states and Indian tribes commit the region’s families and businesses to an unprecedented \$10 billion investment in salmon recovery over 10 years. These costs will show up soon in electricity rates, with BPA seeking a 2010 increase that’s likely to end up near 15 to 20 percent, in part due to increased fish and wildlife spending.

The plaintiffs and allied litigants are clearly unhappy with the prospect of the lawsuit ending. They are looking for ways to reopen the BiOp and keep the litigation balls in the air while they work the new Administration and Congress on their ultimate goal: removal of the Snake River dams. In a March 17 letter, the plaintiffs said:

“With such guidance from the Court, plaintiffs believe they could work with the new administration and the federal agencies...to identify a series of specific and detailed steps that could be agreed upon and then embodied in a stipulated order for moving forward.”

In other words, the plaintiffs would throw out the baby with the bath water, rehash earlier issues and revise the federal agencies' salmon recovery plan, including dam breaching. On top of their plan to keep the litigation going, supporters of breaching the dams are taking their case to the Administration and Congress to promote removal studies and start from scratch with a new salmon forum process.

We believe the tremendous efforts and investments of the past three decades, not to mention the sovereigns' process that resulted in the 2008 BiOp, are enough. It's time to move on and help salmon.

Northwest RiverPartners is an alliance of farmers, utilities, ports and business that promote the economic and environmental benefits of the Columbia and Snake Rivers and Salmon recovery policies based on sound science. For more information, please visit www.nwriverpartners.org.