



Have Dam Removal Advocates Forgotten the Fish?

“For the sake of the people and fish of the Northwest, it’s time to set this plan in motion.”

That was a statement NOAA Administrator Jane Lubchenco made back in September, when the new Administration first announced its support for the 2008 Biological Opinion.



We agreed then, and we agree now. And after a federal court hearing this week, we have reason to hope we are a crucial step closer to getting out of the courtroom and implementing a comprehensive plan to help fish.

Judge Redden called the combined plan and Adaptive Management Implementation Plan (AMIP), added by the Obama Administration after extensive review, “a really good piece of work.” He looked directly at Dr. Lubchenco, who was sitting in the courtroom along with other federal and tribal dignitaries, when he said, “I think you’ve done a good job.”

The judge expressed procedural concerns about how the AMIP could be legally appended to the BiOp without giving rise to a procedural challenge. He then gave the federal agencies an opportunity to address that issue and try to resolve it.

The judge seemed to take stock of all that has been offered on behalf of the region’s salmon. The BiOp represents the most aggressive plan ever to restore anadromous fish, and the Obama Administration and its top fisheries scientists stand behind it.

The plan commits up to a billion dollars annually to restoration efforts, maintains an approach that addresses factors across the salmon lifecycle, and includes safety nets and insurance policies should the fish runs flounder. It incorporates accords with Northwest Indian tribes, and has garnered the support of three of four states. A total of nine Sovereigns have signed on for the plan – unprecedented in the history of this litigation.

The broad support caused the plaintiffs to say, this should not be about “the court counting noses.” It is not. It is quite simply a monumental and historic piece of work.

We find it almost inconceivable that the plaintiffs would want the judge to throw this all away and force the federal agencies back to the drawing board. But that is exactly what they argued for on Monday. Are they so intent on finding a legal technicality to undo all of the work or so bent on Snake River dam removal that they've forgotten about what's good for the salmon? We certainly hope not.

"There is one thing to keep in mind amid all of the litigation we have seen over the past several years. At the end of the day, this is about the fish." That is the statement Dr. Lubchenco made to the media at the conclusion of the hearing Monday. She has a good way of reminding everyone what is really important here and what is at stake.

This has been a long road and we haven't yet reached our destination. But we can all celebrate Thanksgiving with the knowledge that a lot of dedicated people have come together to do what once seemed undoable and to get us this far. For that, we can be thankful.

Related Information:

[Dr. Lubchenco' statement on the Biological Opinion and Adaptive Management Plan](#)
[Adaptive Management Implementation Plan](#)



Terry Flores is Executive Director of Northwest River Partners, an alliance of farmers, utilities, ports and businesses 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.