



Bidding Adieu to a Momentous 2009

No matter the outcome, we have done our best.

If there was an unofficial theme to RiverPartners' annual meeting December 9, those words capture it. The organization, its members and partners, stepped up again and again in 2009 to make a difference in the debate that still rages over the region's salmon plan. A resolution may not be far away, and win, lose, or draw, we gave it our all.



RiverPartners chairman John Saven called the past 12 months, the most challenging since the organization began. The federal court "again proved to be unpredictable on the salmon plan," and there were numerous trips to Washington, D.C. to educate and inform the congressional delegation about what was at stake. RiverPartners built on its ties with the regional coalition, including the states of Washington, Idaho, and Montana, as well as the upriver tribes, in 2009. And we strengthened our relationship with BPA and the federal family.

And as Saven noted, "with big challenges came big rewards." The Obama Administration endorsed the plan, and support resounded throughout the media in the Northwest, a testimony to our ability to tell our story well and persuade those with the power of the pen. Three states and six tribes filed a historic joint brief with the court, the first such union in decades of litigation, he pointed out.

One of the most insightful reflections on the year came in BPA Administrator Steve Wright's description of winning Administration support for the science that underpins the 2008 salmon plan. NOAA's new chief, Dr. Jane Lubchenco, herself an expert marine ecologist, personally oversaw the Administration's review.

Wright acknowledged the tension he felt, with so much on the line, when the NOAA team and the independent scientists set about their work. In the end, the Administration concluded that the scientific foundation for the plan is sound, with one independent expert calling it "a world-class analysis, using the best available data." And Dr. Lubchenco is resolute in her support.

On November 23, tribal chairs of the Yakama and Warm Springs joined federal officials, including Dr. Lubchenco, in the courtroom. It was truly a remarkable day, Wright said.



While Wright said he cannot predict what Judge Redden will do, “we have produced a plan that deserves high praise.” It is based on action, measured performance, accountability, and adaptability, with fidelity to science and the law. “The plan deserves to be successful in the courtroom,” and we can take pride in our effort, he stated.

Executive Director Terry Flores echoed Wright’s sentiments, telling the audience at the meeting, “we all gave it our very best effort.” A bad ruling from the court “won’t be for lack of trying” on our part -- or that of our partners, she said.

Even if we get a positive ruling, our work is far from done. RiverPartners has a full plate of tasks in 2010, not the least of which is to chip away at intransigent mind sets, Flores said. We need to put to rest the insistence that dams are THE problem and that BPA can continue to be a deep pocket for all of the problems fish face.

We are cautiously upbeat about our prospects in the courtroom, but we also must remain vigilant. The coalition that got us here – states, tribes, river users – is fragile and could be easily fractured. The environmental and fishing litigants will continue to find ways to attack the dams, she predicted. They have nothing to lose, and given that high-stakes litigation draws members to their ranks and can result in lucrative legal reimbursement from the government, they have much to gain.

With the continued help and support of our organization and our partners, RiverPartners has the strength and perseverance to weather the storms ahead. We have done our best and will continue to do so, Flores said.



And now, we’re putting the wrap on a momentous 2009. We wish you all happy and safe holidays, and time with your families and friends. See you in 2010!

Related Information: [2009 Accomplishments/Annual Report](#)



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.