



2011: A Year of Optimism and Accomplishments

2011

Chairman John Prescott kicked off RiverPartners' Annual Meeting noting that *"salmon are what it is really supposed to be about, not litigation, Biological Opinions or judges."* Prescott pointed out the outstanding adult returns in 2011, in which nearly all salmon and steelhead listed under the Endangered Species Act trended upwards.

"The numbers don't lie," he said. The impressive returns included 700,000 Chinook salmon coming back to the Columbia and Snake rivers to spawn. Snake River fall Chinook stood at over 25,000 returning adults – exceeding criteria set under the Endangered Species Act to "delist" the fish, a trend for several years in a row. The Snake River sockeye also continue to rebound, back from the days when Lonesome Larry made his solo swim to Redfish Lake in Idaho, Prescott noted.

BPA Administrator Steve Wright also spoke to RiverPartners members about the enormous progress being made as a result of the region's efforts on behalf of salmon. And while the August ruling from Judge Redden wasn't everything we would have liked, he said, we accepted the challenge the decision posed, and we will be back in court in late 2013 to prove the salmon plan and its habitat measures are working.

Our allies in the states and tribes have hung with us, and we are focused on implementing the plan, Wright said. We can't speculate on what the new judge will mean for the litigation, but if we do a great job on implementation we'll make his job easier, he concluded.

Terry Flores, Executive Director, delivered a message of optimism and accomplishment. She noted that even though Judge Redden's long-awaited ruling was a "bit of a mixed bag," the coalition of federal, state and tribal allies that RiverPartners works with closely won a partial victory. All of their energy in the next two years will be focused on implementing on-the-ground habitat restoration measures to help salmon, and will not be spent in a court room. The litigants have not succeeded in selling the court, the Administration or the Northwest congressional delegation on a new stakeholder or settlement process, and the appointment of a new judge means there will be fresh eyes on the case, which has gone on far too long, Flores told the annual meeting crowd.

RiverPartners also was instrumental in winning a lawsuit over water quality in Washington. The state successfully defended standards designed to protect salmon from gas bubble disease that can result from too much water being "spilled" over the dams.

Flores also noted that the media “simply didn’t buy” the anti-dam message some groups promoted during the removal of the Elwha and Condit dams. And we made our own headlines in 2011 touting the enormous value of the clean renewable power-producing dams on the Columbia and Snake rivers. Our headlines in major Northwest papers declared “In The Northwest, Hydropower Is Still King,” and “Arguments for Removal of Snake River Dams are Laughable, Absurd” and “When the Water Starts Pouring, the Dams Go Into action,” among many others.

Flores credited members, supporters, staff and consultants – “the RiverPartners army” – with the 2011 successes. We have our work cut out for us in 2012, but we have a strong voice, a lot of credibility and we are being heard. RiverPartners will be in the midst of the action, keeping the focus on salmon recovery and the value of the Northwest’s premier renewable resource, the Columbia River hydro system. RiverPartners is making a positive difference for the salmon, renewable energy, and families and businesses in the Northwest, she said.

With that wrap up, RiverPartners wishes you the happiest of holidays. We look forward to another year of partnership in 2012!



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.

