



Let Science Rule

At every turn, those who have been litigating over federal hydro operations for nearly two decades have seized every opportunity to make their case to and through the media. Now is no exception. Except this time around, their claims surrounding the regional salmon plan (or Biological Opinion in legal terms) seem even more outlandish with references to conspiracy theories and Wizard of Oz imagery.



The reality is that the salmon plan currently before Judge Redden is absolutely without any precedent - anywhere. It has the support of nine sovereigns who are in agreement on the merit and science in the plan, it has the endorsement of two Presidential Administrations, it provides over \$1 billion in additional funds for salmon, and the collaboration which led to its development is unparalleled and remains strong.

Judge Redden deserves the lion's share of credit for bringing all the federal and state agencies and tribes together in what is called "...the greatest alignment of sovereigns ever on the Columbia River..." in the latest brief submitted by the states of Washington, Idaho, and Montana.

The strength and breadth of tribal support for this plan in particular, including both up and down river tribes, is momentous. For example, the joint brief of the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation, the Yakama Nation and the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, says it best:

"The Collaboration" is historic, and must be preserved if salmon, steelhead, lamprey and other native species are to be restored to healthy, harvestable, self-sustaining levels in time. For nearly two decades the sovereign governments in the region were balkanized, avoiding any critical mass of political will to confront, let alone resolve, the tremendously difficult social, economic, and scientific issues that come with truly tackling the work of protecting and restoring diminished Columbia Basin salmon runs.

There is finally a policy and technical coalition organized behind a specific salmon plan coupled with the funding resources to implement it. Only continued litigation will prevent that coalition from moving forward – the lack of agreement on the plan, the lack of funding, and the science analysis paralysis is very nearly behind us."



Accusations that the Obama Administration did not use “best science” are especially off-base and counterproductive. The science underpinning the salmon plan was developed by the state and tribal salmon on-the-ground expert biologists and scientists – not federal bureaucrats. Every one of those biologists knows how to protect habitat and undertake other measures in the plan that will benefit salmon, steelhead and other fish and wildlife species. It also was independently reviewed by some of the best scientists and minds in the country.

The litigants’ problem is that the best science does not support their radical ideology (hence their stridency). Everyone (but the litigants) agrees that this plan brings the best and most current science to bear. And, the plan is bearing fruit. We’ve seen some of the most robust runs of returning salmon since the 1950s and early 60s. Even the state of Oregon, one of the most aggressive litigants, must agree many runs are exceeding expectations, having just opened up a major harvest on threatened, protected Snake River fall Chinook!

We are at a historic moment in time and Judge Redden’s and the region’s legacy is at hand. Fortunately, emotionally-charged rhetoric cannot stand in the way of, or delay, all of the good science and work being done collaboratively by the sovereigns and supporters of the salmon plan. We need not be distracted by such naysayers, and instead must turn our time and energy to getting out of the court room and taking the actions that will actually lead to the ultimate restoration of salmon.



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.