



Summer spill harms salmon, adds costs

August 5th, 2010

By Congressman Doc Hastings

As those of us who live in central Washington know all too well, there are strict policies governing the Columbia River and Snake River water, many of which are tied to efforts to recover endangered salmon species. While I support common sense, balanced efforts to strengthen salmon runs and restore threatened populations, I do have serious concerns federal policymakers are ignoring science and basic economics when formulating their summer dam spill plans.



Every year for the past several years, I have expressed strong opposition to the federal policy of spilling water at eight Columbia and Snake River hydropower dams during summer months.

Recent scientific studies have shown increased summer spill at the dams actually does more harm to fish than do alternative fish transportation methods. If the goal of managing the hydroelectric dams is to protect salmon and increase their survival rates, common sense would mean spill would not be increased and other alternatives would be utilized.

In addition to not being the best method to protect salmon, spilling water at the dams results in lost hydropower generation. Increasing spill leads to tens of millions of dollars in lost power generation, meaning higher energy prices for families and small businesses.

That's why I recently reiterated my concerns about the administration's recently filed 2010 Summer Fish Operations Plan and urged they reconsider their spill policy. Continued spill is particularly troubling in a year when water runoff is the second lowest in a decade, regional unemployment rates are over 9 percent and the Bonneville Power Administration's power revenues are forecast to be \$200 million below expenses, signaling the possibility of a rate increase.

Since a federal judge in Portland, who I might note is a lawyer-politician and not a scientist, first ordered summer spill to begin in 2006, it's estimated this spill has cost our region hundreds of millions of dollars, has aided only a few dozen fish and has potentially destroyed many more. A far better solution would be to end or reduce summer spill by using safer transport methods and then invest a portion of the revenues from increased power generation into additional fish protection efforts.

I will continue to advocate a common sense, balanced approach to salmon recovery, grounded in science, that will ensure both abundant salmon runs and that the benefits of our hydropower system are maintained for generations to come.