



The following is an opinion piece that was authored by Northwest RiverPartners Director Terry Flores in response to an editorial that appeared in the *Idaho Statesman*.

### Cooperation key to helping salmon and steelhead



In its May 28th editorial, the *Idaho Statesman* was right in pointing out that only negotiation and trust among multiple and diverse interests will lead to salmon and steelhead recovery in the Northwest. It was wrong when it touted dam breaching or removal as the best way to help salmon. In fact, the two statements conflict. Let me explain.

It is true that there are four large obstacles to salmon and steelhead recovery in the region – but they are not the dams. They are mindsets. And for the Northwest to come together and develop a reasonable, fair and science-based salmon solution it must work hard to overcome those mindsets.

**1. The Us vs. Them Mentality** – Good guys vs. bad guys. Salmon vs. dams. Winners vs. losers. That approach is polarizing. In the salmon issue we all have a common problem. We need to work together on a common solution. Adversarial tactics don't solve problems, they create them. The *Idaho Statesman's* editorial was right when it said that “salmon will not be saved in a courtroom.” We agree.

**2. Working at Cross Purposes** - Salmon recovery is hindered by conflicting laws, regulations and practices. There are conflicts between hatchery and wild fish, between protecting endangered salmon and harvesting them, between the many values the dams provide and their effect on salmon. Only through a collaborative and comprehensive 4-“H” approach – that deals equally with Hatcheries, Harvest, Habitat and Hydropower – can these conflicts be resolved. Calling for dam removal and regional collaboration at the same time just won't work.

**3. The Belief in a Silver Bullet** – Salmon have an incredibly complex lifecycle. In the course of their lives, they travel thousands of miles and encounter a host of different environments and conditions that affect them: ocean conditions, predators, harvest policies, habitat loss, hydrosystem operations, and the list goes on. Those who promote a “silver bullet” solution, like dam breaching, are not dealing with the recovery issue comprehensively or taking a very realistic look at the science.

An earlier *Idaho Statesman* editorial (May 24th), pointed to this year's initially low and late salmon runs as rationale for dam breaching. Indeed, the runs were late, but in the last several weeks salmon have returned in such numbers that the final forecast for the spring run is nearly double initial expectations. Historical records clearly show that fish runs experience large fluctuations year over year. This is compelling evidence that factors other than the dams have a huge effect on the number of returning salmon. There is no “silver bullet.”

**4. Politics over Science** – Politics have long overshadowed science in guiding salmon recovery efforts. For example, there is still a pervasive belief that there is a relationship to augmenting river flows and salmon survival. Yet, in his December 2005 ruling US District Court Judge Redden rejected plaintiffs’ requests for more flows. He even quoted the Independent Scientific Advisory Board (a body that advises tribes, agencies, and the NW Power and Conservation Council), which said that this belief is “no longer supportable.”

It may seem logical to call for more flows for fish, but the best available science just doesn’t support it. There is far more we need to learn about these complex creatures, and we should resist the temptation to head down costly paths that may make us feel better but provide no demonstrable benefit to fish.

The *Idaho Statesman* is right to call for increased cooperation and collaboration as the means to recover the region’s salmon and steelhead, including upstream and downstream interests. Northwest RiverPartners, representing a broad group of regional interests – river users, large and small businesses, farmers, ports and utilities – is working hard to promote this.

We have joined with the states of Washington and Montana, the Spokane, Colville and Idaho Kootenai Tribes, and are working closely together in the Columbia/Snake process to develop a new plan for salmon and steelhead. We don’t need to sacrifice a healthy economy – or any dams for that matter – to develop a fair, balanced and science-based plan to put salmon on the road to recovery. But we do need to change our approach – and our mindsets.

#### **Quick Links**

- Federal Caucus –  
Find out what the Federal Caucus has to say about long-term salmon and steelhead recovery at: [http://www.salmonrecovery.gov/reports\\_and\\_papers/docs/2006/Federal\\_Caucus\\_Fact\\_Sheet\\_June\\_2006.pdf](http://www.salmonrecovery.gov/reports_and_papers/docs/2006/Federal_Caucus_Fact_Sheet_June_2006.pdf)
- Northwest RiverPartners –  
Check out our Web site at: [www.nwriverpartners.org](http://www.nwriverpartners.org)

*Northwest RiverPartners is a partnership of farmers, electric utilities and large and small businesses in the Pacific Northwest, joined together to ensure that the Columbia and Snake rivers remain living, working rivers. It was founded on the belief that these rivers are the Northwest’s greatest natural resource providing residents with clean and affordable electricity, flood control, irrigation for our farm lands, healthy fish and wildlife, maritime trade, and a multitude of recreational opportunities. For more information about Northwest RiverPartners, visit its Web site at [www.nwriverpartners.org](http://www.nwriverpartners.org).*