REMEmBERING CELILLO

BETRAYALS OF TRUST

Benefits of Restoring Snake River salmon
Bush’s Shell Game in Bristol Bay
SPRING 2007

SPECIAL ISSUE: IN DEFENSE OF SALMON

Betrayals of Trust: Deceptive Government Agencies Rob Tribes of Their Salmon, Culture and Economy .... 3

Overfishing, Dams Led to Tribal Poverty .... 4

13 Most Endangered Salmon Runs in the Columbia Basin .... 5

Fishing and Conservation Coalition Seeks Dam Federal Dam Breaching Study .... 6

Bonnevile’s Attacks on Fish Passage Center Began in the 1960s .... 8

Bonnevile’s Long History of Stifling the Salmon .... 9

The Benefits of Restoring Snake River Salmon .... 10

Gagging the Salmon-Counters .... 11

The Columbia’s Deadliest Dams .... 12-13

Returning the Columbia’s Salmon to Canada .... 14

Do the Legendary “June Hogs” Still Exist? .... 15

Hanford Reach’s Death Traps: Wild Chinook Die by the Millions in the Desert Sun? .... 15

Two Elders Recall, Live, Fishing and the Loss of Celilo: Bruce Jim .... 16

Chief Tommy Thompson .... 17

Bush’s Shell Game Threaten World’s Largest Sockeye Runs: Pacificorp Backs Away from Dam Removal on the Klamath River .... 19

Editorial: Celilo 50 Years Later .... 20

Resource Directory .... 21

Dear Reader

Inevitably, people will ask: why try to save the salmon? It’s a question that implies that it’s not possible. The answer is complex. The law, federal treaties and or own moral compass require salmon restoration. Too many communities rely on the salmon to simply forget about them and walk away. The salmon is a big part of who we are in the Northwest. To continue to destroy them destroys a part of us.

Some say that the forces of global warming and changing ocean conditions work against finding a solution. In fact, global warming requires us to do worker harder for the salmon.

The powerful political and economic forces that control the Columbia River would like the salmon to solve the problems themselves. One large industry group, the Northwest River Partners, falsely claims the salmon are doing fine. Members include Portland General Electric, Pacificorp, Puget Sound Energy and Tacoma City Light.

The full list of entities who belong to this group is at www.nwriverpartners.org.

We urge all of our readers to ask these companies to get behind restoration of the salmon, even if it means removing some small dams.

Readers should also contact members of Congress and request a full investigation of the continuing obstruction of salmon recovery by the Bonneville Power Administration, NOAA Fisheries and President Bush.

We are deeply grateful for the support provided by the Seven Generation Fund and the Ford Foundation, Samantha Campbell and the Keith Campbell Foundation, and hundreds of our readers whose donations helped make this report possible.

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Cascadia Times is not simply about furry animals and remote forests. It’s also about the people who live in this region, their communities and their quality of life. Cascadia Times makes connections across the West, with a broad, bio-regional outlook.

Cover Photo: Tribal fishing at Celilo Falls, 1955. Above: Fish ladder at Ice Harbor Dam on the Snake.

Photos courtesy Army Corps of Engineers.
BETRAYALS OF TRUST
Deceptive government agencies rob tribes of their salmon, culture and economy
By Paul Koberstein

Celilo once produced more fish than any other aboriginal fishing site in the world, at a time when the Columbia produced more salmon than any other river in the world. Today the world's largest hydropower system entombs the falls and countless other ancient fishing sites along the river.
REMEMBERING CELILo

Overfishing, dams led to tribal poverty

Over the decades, tribal access to their usual fishing places was often unenforced, usually disputed, and, since the completion of the hydro system, almost fully blocked, according to a thoroughly researched book published last year, The Si'illoo Way: Indians, Salmon and Law on the Columbia River, by Joseph C. Dupris, Kathleen S. Hall and William H. Rodgers Jr.

Destructive fishing practices destroyed much of the Columbia's salmon runs in the early 1900s. Most of these practices occurred far downstream from the Indians' traditional fishing places, where non-Indians fished, often using rapacious devices like fishwheels. In 1938, when Bonneville Dam opened, the tribal commercial catch accounted for only 8.6 percent of the total catch in the entire river.

While overfishing destroyed much of the tribes' former wealth, fishing has been significantly curtailed. The effects of dams have been even worse. Tribal people are experiencing elevated poverty and death rates well in excess of the general population. A 1999 report on Columbia River tribes by economist Phil Meyer found "overwhelming levels of poverty, unemployment that is between three and thirteen times higher than for the region's non-Indians, and rates of death that are from twenty percent higher to more than twice the death rate for residents of Washington, Oregon and Idaho as a whole. If located outside the United States, such conditions might fairly be described as third world."

With wild salmon fast disappearing, Congress provided hatcheries to make up for the losses, but in many ways the hatchery system has been a disaster for the tribes as well. Until recent years, the government built most of the hatcheries in the lower Columbia, far away from the tribal fishing areas and thus nearly worthless as mitigation for tribal losses.

Not a single hatchery has ever sustainedly supplanted a wild run. But given the extremely poor condition of salmon populations in the basin, hatcheries are necessary to allow for treaty reserved fishing.

NOAA Fisheries Regional Director Bob Lohn said the agency is reviewing the region's 189 hatchery programs. It will examine whether the hatcheries support the recovery of salmon, and whether they allow harvest at places where they can provide the greatest benefits. NOAA will also investigate whether hatcheries promote more harvests of fish that need protection.

BETRAYALS OF TRUST

(Continued from Page 3)

The Huntington Fraud

The words "remember Celilo" have become an inspiration to tribal leaders and their allies who see the destruction of the Celilo Falls fishery as emblematic of a continuing series of betrayals in which the U.S. government has failed to honor its legal trust obligations to the fish, the tribes and their rights to catch fish.

In the words of the 1855 treaties, the tribes reserved the right to fish at all their "usual and accustomed fishing grounds and stations" forever, while ceding 40 million acres in the Northwest to the U.S. Government. Eventually, the government sold most of the land to white settlers, while allowing the salmon to wither, first by overfishing by non-Indians, and later by hydropower production.

The betrayals began as early as 1865, when unscrupulous federal agent J. Petrit Huntington presented a fake "Treaty with the Tribes of Middle Oregon" to Congress for ratification. The agent claimed the Warm Springs Indians traded their off-reservation fishing rights for $3,500. The treaty was a fraud; the tribe did not, would not, sign such a document. The money disappeared, and with it Huntington. The Huntington fraud not only remains law, but it was used by the Army Corps of Engineers in the early 1950s prior to the construction of The Dalles Dam. The Army, seeking support for the dam, told members of the Warm Springs Nation that the 1867 treaty disqualified them for compensation payments for the loss of Celilo Falls. Ultimately the Army decided to pay a modest sum, but not without reopening some old wounds.

Huntington clearly wasn't the last federal agent to deceive the tribes. Far from it.

A Cascadia Times investigation has found evidence that Bonneville and the Bush administration are using such tricks as deception, secrecy, gagging key government scientists, censorship of key government documents and lying to further their control of cheap power, regardless of the impact on salmon or the tribes. Their hydro operations are so perilously close to criminal under the Endangered Species Act that a federal judge has sternly warned their leaders that they risk "severe consequences" if the illegal hydro operations continue.

(Continued on Page 6)

The 1865 Treaty with the Tribes of Middle Oregon was a fraud. A federal agent claimed the tribes sold their off-reservation fishing rights for $3,500. They did no such thing. Then the agent and the money disappeared. And yet, the treaty is still federal law.

KILLER OF CELILo FALLS — The ghost of Celilo Falls is buried beneath this reservoir behind The Dalles Dam. The Army Corps of Engineers, which built the dam, named the reservoir Lake Celilo. The Bonneville Power Administration is responsible for selling the dam's electric production and for the safe passage of fish.
The 13 most endangered salmon runs in the Columbia Basin

Salmon populations in the Columbia Basin are constantly changing. In some years, numbers increase, giving hope that recovery is on the way. Then they reverse direction. Hydrosystem operations in the basin affect trends, as do changes in rainfall and ocean conditions.

In the late 1990s, good river and ocean conditions sparked an increase in the salmon runs. A severe drought in 2001, however, led to declines in the last three years. The number of salmon crossing Bonneville has declined 50 percent since 2001, and forecasts for 2007 signal another down year.

Recent assessments on the long-term trends for ESA-listed species, including Snake River steelhead, spring chinook, and fall chinook, and Upper Columbia River Chinook and steelhead are discouraging. Although some of these populations have shown short-term increases in adult returns, all are still experiencing a long-term population decline and remain at significant risk, especially in terms of abundance (number of adults) and productivity, said Gretchen Oosterhout, a noted salmon statistician.

**Salmon returns to Wallowa Lake, Oregon, were estimated at between 24,000 and 30,000 per year.**

**2. Snake River fall Chinook**
Historic population: About 450,000 around 1900.
2005 population: Fewer than 5,000.
Wild component: 40%.

**3. Snake River spring/summer Chinook**
Historic population: About 2 million around 1900.
2005 population: About 30,000.
Wild component: 20%.

**4. Snake River steelhead**
Historic population: About 325,000 in 1900.
2005 population: About 150,000.
Wild component: 15%.

**5. Upper Columbia River spring Chinook**
Historic population: About 30,000 in 1900.
2005 population: Close to 2,000.
Wild component: About 100 fish.

**6. Upper Columbia River steelhead**
Historic population: About 20,000 in 1900.
2005 population: About 18,000.
Wild component: 9 to 35%.

**7. Middle Columbia River steelhead**
Historic population: About 100,000 in 1900.
2005 population: About 20,000.
Wild component: 70%.

**8. Lower Columbia River chinook**
Historic population: About 500,000 around 1900.
2005 population: About 60,000.
Wild component: 50%.
Listed: Threatened in 1999.
Notes: Cannery records suggest a peak run of 4.6 million fish in 1883. The species includes all native populations from the mouth of the Columbia River to the crest of the Cascade Range, excluding populations above Willamette Falls. Natural production occurs in approximately 20 populations, although as of 2001 only one population had a mean spawner abundance exceeding 1,000 fish.

**9. Lower Columbia River steelhead**
Historic population: About 250,000 million around 1900.
2005 population: About 16,000.
Wild component: 70%.
Notes: The Lower Columbia River Steelhead encompasses all runs in tributaries between the Cowichan and Wind Rivers on the Columbia side of the Columbia River and the Willamette and Hood Rivers on the Oregon side.

**10. Lower Columbia River coho**
Historic population: About 1 million around 1900.
2005 population: Fewer than 200,000.
Wild component: 10%.
Notes: There are only two remaining populations, in the Clackamas and Sandy rivers populations, down from an estimated 23 historical populations in the species. About 40 percent of its original habitat is inaccessible.

**11. Lower Columbia River chum**
Historic population: About 1.4 million around 1900.
2005 population: About 12,000.
Wild component: 90%.
Listed: Threatened in 1999.
Notes: Chum salmon in the Columbia River spawn in tributaries and areas below the Bonneville Dam. Most runs disappeared by the 1950s.

**12. Upper Willamette River chinook**
Historic population: About 300,000 in 1900.
2005 population: About 50,000.
Wild component: 20%.
Notes: The Upper Willamette River Chinook species includes native spring-run populations above Willamette Falls and in the Clackamas River. Of the historical populations, 8 to 10 have been extirpated or nearly extirpated. Natural production currently occurs in approximately 20 populations, although only one population has a mean spawner abundance exceeding 1,000 fish.

**13. Upper Willamette River steelhead**
Historic population: About 200,000 in 1900.
2005 population: About 5,000.
Wild component: 75%.
Listed: Threatened in 1999.
Notes: The Upper Willamette River Steelhead species occupies the Willamette River and tributaries upstream of Willamette Falls, extending to and including the Calfpooia River. Native winter steelhead within this species have been declining since 1971 and have exhibited large fluctuations in abundance.

Source: Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Fund Report to Congress, 2006; NOAA Fisheries
REMEMBERING CELILO

Fishing and conservation coalition seeks dam breaching study

(Continued from Page 4)

A mugging on the way to the courthouse

Congress created the Bonneville Power Administration in 1937 to sell power from federal dams on the river — just before the completion of Bonneville Dam in 1938. Today, the power agency has emerged as Lord of the River, selling three billion dollars worth of electricity each year, a revenue stream it claims is threatened by proposed measures to protect salmon. Despite this obvious conflict of interest, Bonneville until 2005 was allowed to make daily life-and-death decisions on behalf of migrating juvenile fish, when a federal judge stepped in.

Dams blocked salmon from reaching 55 percent of its historic range in the basin and buried almost all fishing sites in the mainstem under at least 100 feet of water. In 1910, Swan Falls Dam blocked salmon from reaching the Upper Snake. Owyhee Dam on Oregon’s Owyhee River blocked access to southeast Oregon, southern Idaho and northern Nevada in 1932. Grand Coulee in 1941 blocked access to the Upper Columbia in Canada.

If they chose to, Bonneville and the other federal agencies can reduce salmon losses by increasing flows and unleashing water over spillways, but those methods cost a great deal of money. Instead, Bonneville tries to minimize its costs by collecting salmon upstream and barging them around the dams. But barging causes deadly trauma to most of the fish, according to biologists with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and other agencies who have studied the phenomenon.

Fishing and environmental groups have sued the government numerous times since 1993 over its failures to reduce salmon mortality in compliance with the Endangered Species Act. Three times, federal courts held that the government was operating the Columbia’s hydropower system in violation of the Act. Bonneville claims its operations are entirely legal, and disputes many of the court’s findings.

Under the Endangered Species Act, NOAA Fisheries must determine whether Bonneville’s actions comply with the law, or whether they would pose a “jeopardy” to listed species. It does so through a “biological opinion.” NOAA has issued four biological opinions since 1993, each finding that Bonneville’s operation plans are legal so long as the agency adopted additional measures to help the fish. Courts have struck down three of the four biological opinions.

As professor Michael Blumm of Northwestern School of Law in Portland sees it, Bonneville has persuaded the public into thinking that it has been “making a meaningful attempt to restore salmon spawning populations, when in fact it was doing no such thing.”

In an article last year in Environmental Law, Blumm says the Bush Administration’s entire approach to Columbia Basin salmon has been “dominated by deception.” For example, when a federal judge rejected a biological opinion (BiOp) in 2003 because the provisions were not reasonably certain to be implemented, the Bush Administration seized the opportunity to completely revise the standards BiOps must satisfy under ESA. The result produced a new BiOp in late 2004, in which the Administration attempted to reverse an earlier conclusion that Columbia Basin hydrosystem operations jeopardized listed salmon runs — “a brazen attempt to ratify the operational status quo for at least five additional years.”

Federal Judge James Redden, who threw out the last two BiOps, as they are called, has grown increasingly skeptical. Both Bonneville and NOAA are too willing “to risk large numbers of listed salmon, while professing to fulfill their ESA duty to avoid jeopardy” for the salmon, he says.

He says that the federal agencies “have repeatedly and collectively failed to demonstrate a willingness to do what is necessary to halt and reverse the trend toward species extinction in both the Columbia and Snake River Basin whatever the cost.”

The federal agencies, he said, “appear to be narrowly focusing their attention on what the establishment is capable of handling with minimal disruption,” instead of on the salmon’s needs.

Bonneville and NOAA argued in 2004 that the damage done by dams can be overlooked because dams are part of the natural landscape, for purposes of the Endangered Species Act. Redden found this ludicrous and ordered them to rewrite their hydro operations plans. The next version is scheduled to be out in July 2007.

He declared that without a change in direction, the hydrosystem was headed for a “train wreck.” He vowed the court would “run the river” itself if NOAA Fisheries or Bonneville didn’t correct its failures, and soon. “Such a dysfunction of government is not a rational option,” Redden ruled. “There must be cooperation between the parties and all of the three branches of government to avoid such an embarrassment.”

Bonneville, eager to avoid losing its authority to run the river, has pushed back hard in an effort to shield itself from Redden’s threat. Last December, it coerced tribal governments into helping reach a temporary settlement of ESA litigation, in an effort to circumvent Redden’s mandate that it fix its salmon problem, at least for 2007.

Bonneville offered the tribes $5 million in 2007 for tribal habitat and hatchery projects that employ 60 tribal staff — but only if tribal leaders accepted

Bonnieville “appears to have concluded that they cannot win in court by following the law. Some of the parties (in the case) are being mugged on the way to the courthouse.” — Todd True, Earthjustice
A failure now will result in vacating the biological opinion. This may sound benign to some, but the parties are aware of the severe consequences that would follow.” — Federal Judge James Redden

BETRAYALS OF TRUST

Bonneville Dam adult salmon counts: 1996 - 2006

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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
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<tr>
<td>1996</td>
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<tr>
<td>1998</td>
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<td>2000</td>
<td>952,921</td>
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<td>2001</td>
<td>1,985,465</td>
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<td>2002</td>
<td>1,549,477</td>
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<td>2004</td>
<td>1,627,98</td>
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<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>964,539</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

UP AND DOWN — The number of salmon crossing Bonneville Dam in 2006 was less than half the number in 2001. The high numbers in 2001-2004 are thought to be a result of good ocean and river conditions. Forecasts for 2007 suggest a continuing decline. Source: Fish Passage Center

(Continued from Page 6)

Bonneville's terms. First, the tribes could not seek a court injunction requiring more salmon-friendly hydropower operations in 2007, no matter how deadly to salmon the operations might be; and second, they could not provide technical assistance to salmon groups who in Redden's courtroom are fighting Bonneville over its hydro operations. Reluctantly, the tribes agreed to both of these conditions.

Bonneville also asked the tribes to participate in press events intended to portray the agency's operations as friendly to salmon, said Charles Hudson, a spokesman for CRITFC. Bonneville also asked the tribes for help in "getting the plaintiffs to settle" the ESA case, Hudson said the tribes flatly rejected both of these demands.

Bonneville CEO Steve Wright "was speaking publicly about the agreement before some of the tribes had signed it, leaving a bad taste in the mouth of tribal leaders," Hudson added.

Todd True, a lawyer for the plaintiffs, led by the National Wildlife Federation, said Bonneville "appears to have concluded that they cannot win in court by following the law. Some of the parties (in the case) are being mugged on the way to the courthouse."

"Bonneville was playing dirty," says Nicole Cordan, legal director for Save Our Wild Salmon. "Bonneville doesn't seem to like the fact that the Endangered Species Act applies to them, so they are looking for a way around the law. I don't think that is how a federal agency should behave."

Greg Delovich, a Bonneville vice president for environment, fish and wildlife, said in an interview with Cascadia Times that Bonneville prefers to settle the ESA litigation with a long-term agreement lasting through 2017. Without a settlement, he said, the tribal jobs will be eliminated next year.

Rob Lothrop, an attorney for CRITFC, said there is "no chance" the tribes will agree to a long-term deal under the same terms that Bonneville demanded in December 2006.

Meanwhile, Bonneville and NOAA must present a new plan for protecting the salmon. The current deadline is July, but the plan has already been delayed by a year. Draft versions of Bonneville's proposal, marked "not for outside distribution," have been leaked beyond the inner circle of government agencies that are reviewing it.

Cascadia Times reviewed a draft dated Dec. 20, which shows that Bonneville is prepared to make just a few minor tweaks in the hydropower system, but nothing remotely close to the "complete overhaul" Federal Judge Malcolm March observed in 1995 is needed. It claims that endangered runs will improve by small amounts. Leading scientists with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and other fishery agencies say the Snake River runs, at least, need to double their rate of survival to give them a fighting chance of recovery. The proposed plan comes nowhere close to that.

"It's not even as good as the status quo," said one source, who could not comment on the record because of the document's sensitive nature.

The "behind closed doors" nature of Bonneville's process for developing the plan appears to conflict with Judge Redden's instructions in his 2005 order.

"The many failures in the past have taught us that the preparation or revision of NOAA's biological opinion on salmon must not be a secret process with a disastrous surprise ending," he wrote.

Of course, Bonneville could simply comply with the judge's wishes, but many of its utility customers have claimed for electric rate relief and have grown increasingly critical of Bonneville's salmon costs. They also contend that the salmon runs are in relatively good health.

One group, the Northwest River Partners, representing utilities, farmers and business, claims on its web site that there are more fish in the Columbia River than at any time since the first dam was built at Bonneville in 1938.

In fact, as the chart at left shows, the total number of salmon crossing Bonneville Dam has declined by 34 percent since 2001, and each year saw fewer fish than the year before.

Northwest River Partners also says that salmon survival is "higher today than it was before the Snake River dams were built."

That statement contradicts studies by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and NOAA's Biological Opinion on remand.

Enron dealings cripple Bonneville

Bonneville has a long history of making huge financial mistakes that have cost the salmon. In the 1970s, it campaigned for the construction of 13 mega-power plants, including 5 nuclear plants and 8 coal plants — even if they weren't needed at the time. "The prudent thing is to keep the plants on schedule," said Sterling Munro, the agency's administrator in 1978. "If we err on the side of building too much, it's easily corrected."

The projects continued until they drove themselves into bankruptcy. Many retirees were wiped out of their life savings. Today, Bonneville and the region's ratepayers still owe $7 billion to federal taxpayers for the fiasco, a major obstacle to salmon funding.

In the late 1990s, Bonneville signed contracts with Enron in which it agreed to buy 700 megawatts of power. It needed the power because it had sold 3,400 megawatts of power beyond its ability to generate. Bonneville decided to purchase the extra power on the open market at speculative rates, a gamble that the Columbia River Indian Tribes warned was too risky and could jeopardize salmon.

But, Bonneville Administrator Judy Johansen sent a letter to Columbia River Indian Tribes promising that salmon programs would not be cut.

Johansen left Bonneville just as the energy crisis was hitting the region in 2000. Bonneville's problems compounded as the region fell into a severe drought, power costs soared, blackouts loomed, and the agency ran seriously low on cash.

Bonneville then did what it always does in a fiscal disaster: stuff the salmon.

Bonneville provided almost no cover for juvenile salmon for their 2001 migration. The fish received very little extra flow and hardly any spill. Bonneville cut direct spending on salmon projects. Bonneville promised to make up for the cuts to the salmon program, but never did.

And yet, Bonneville blamed $1.2 billion of its losses in the power market on the salmon, as if the fish themselves were signing the contracts. Bonneville's Enron dealings triggered an investigation by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, and a Senate hearing. Bonneville was never accused of any illegal actions in its Enron dealings.

Other utilities avoided problems by having the foresight to write escape clauses into their contracts with Enron if it lost its credit rating, became insolvent or failed to truthfully disclose its financial situation at the time the contract was signed.

But Bonneville did not protect itself from Enron. Escaping from its Enron deals cost Bonneville's customers $99 million, a debt they are still paying. Losses over two years amounted to $600 million — money that otherwise could have helped endangered salmon.
REMEMBERING CELILO

Bonneville’s attacks on the Fish Passage Center began in the 1980s

A January 2006 Bonneville Power Administration decision to kill the longstanding agency responsible for counting salmon at the Columbia Basin’s dams is illegal, according to a recent Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals ruling.

Bonneville’s effort to quash the passage center was inspired by words inserted by Idaho Sen. Larry Craig into a congressional report that didn’t have the force of law, the court said.

The Fish Passage Center works with federal, state and tribal fish and wildlife agencies. Bonneville has been resisting the Fish Passage Center’s authority since it was created in 1982.

In a 1986 report, NOAA Fisheries said Bonneville was using its contracting authority over the Fish Passage Center to limit its effectiveness. The report said Bonneville attempted to prevent the Center from coordinating pre-season planning for the annual salmon migration, handling in-season dam operation requests from the fishery agencies, and writing reports about salmon statistics.

NOAA praised the Fish Passage Center for effectively coordinating among the fishery agencies and tribes, but said they all were powerless to influence Bonneville’s hydro operations.

“The agencies’ and tribes’ seat at the table has not materialized, and in its absence, we have not realized Congress’ intent that fish and wildlife be afforded co-equal treatment in the management” of the dams, NOAA said.

Though it was a critic of Bonneville for decades ago, NOAA Fisheries is now an ally of Bonneville in the Endangered Species Act litigation.

Bonneville recently has accused the Fish Passage Center’s reports of bias, a claim that has been debunked by the Independent Science Advisory Board, which assists NOAA Fisheries.

The Circuit Court said Bonneville’s effort to disband the Fish Passage Center was illegal, but did not say whether it violated the Northwest Power Act. The court instead found fault with the procedures Bonneville used to kill the agency.

It specifically criticized Greg Delwiche, vice president for environment, fish and wildlife at Bonneville. It said Delwiche was giving “slave-like attention” to Craig’s words in the congressional report, instead of following the Northwest Power Act, when he killed the Fish Passage Center.

I am not aware of any business or government agencies that calculate the revenues or profits they could have made if they had violated federal laws, regulations or court orders,” Sheets says.

Curiously, the sum includes a $1 billion charge for salmon recovery efforts in 2001, a year when Bonneville found itself in an energy crisis mostly of its own making. That year, Bonneville did almost nothing for fish.

Michael Blumm, a law professor, says the expenditure “are quite misleading, since so much money has been spent on ineffective hatchery and artificial transportation programs that both mask the hydropower system’s operational insensitivity to salmon migration and deceive the public into believing that there exists a functional plan to protect, let alone restore, the salmon runs.”

Bonneville could not legally collect the money it considers “foregone.” To do so, it would have to operate the dams in such an illegal fashion that executives at the Bonneville headquarters in Portland could face criminal prosecution under the ESA.

Said Redden: The federal agencies “and other water users in the Columbia and Snake River Basins could be exposed to liability for taking listed species under Section 9 of the ESA. Given the precarious condition of the Snake River salmon and steelhead runs, the consequences of another failed biological opinion will be serious indeed.”

A failure now will result in vacating the biological opinion, Redden says.

Section 9, the “Take Provision,” of the ESA, makes it unlawful for any person to “harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture, or collect” a listed species. Each knowing violation of the “Take Provision” can result in civil penalties of up to $25,000, criminal penalties of up to $50,000, and imprisonment for up to one year.

Surely, officials at the Bonneville Power Administration and elsewhere are aware of the value of foregone jail time.

Enter the God Squad

bonneville, with encouragement from utility groups, appears to be so determined to continue with the focus that it is willing to play a game of “chicken” with the judge. It apparently wants to see if Redden will actually follow through with his threat to run the river or impose sanctions.

But if the judge doesn’t back down, the Bush administration might have in mind another route around the judge’s courtroom. It could invoke the “God Squad” provision of the ESA that allows a special committee to give an exemption to the law if it poses a significant economic hardship. The God Squad has convened only three times — for the snail darter in Tennessee, the northern spotted owl in the Northwest and the whooping crane on the plains.

It is conceivable that the God Squad could allow the salmon’s extinction. The ESA is a powerful law, but the Indian treaties are equal to the Constitution, the highest law in the land. And the God Squad cannot overturn a federal treaty.

In defending their fishing rights, the tribes turn to the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission, which advises them on legal and technical issues. CRITFC, as it is known, believes that “the fishing right means more than the right of Indians to hang a net in an empty river.”

CRITFC’s roots go back decades, to the days when Celilo Falls was still thriving. The fishery was managed by the Celilo Fish Committee, which protected the runs by making sure everyone shared the harvest and conserved the resource for future generations.

Today, CRITFC is challenging the Bonneville Power Administration at nearly every turn. It has been fighting Bonneville’s efforts to reduce power rates and to cut back spending on salmon recovery projects. It claims that Bonneville will fail to fulfill its duty to restore the runs until the end of the century — possibly long after the salmon are already extinct.

Based on Bonneville’s assumptions, it would take 22 years to implement the production measures in subbasin plans developed by federal, state, and tribal fish managers, and more than 40 years to implement measures designed...
The Columbia River system is carefully operated to help juvenile fish survive passage through the dams and reservoirs, so Bonneville Power Administration wants you to think.

But the agency doesn’t like to talk about its trauma. Bonneville is helping fish through as they endure dams and barges. From reading its public relations material, you wouldn’t know that almost all of these fish die from the stress.

Bonneville has long been one of Bonneville’s specialties. In 1980, when Congress passed the Northwest Power Act, it provided a new opportunity to restore salmon runs in the Columbia Basin. The Act created a Fish and Wildlife Program region, and required the Bonneville Power Administration to implement or pay for much of it.

Bonneville at the time was ignoring a federal law called the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act, according to other federal agencies. Bonneville, in fact, didn’t believe it had obligations to change its hydropower operations on behalf of the salmon. Administrator Sterling Munro said in a letter to fishery agencies in 1978 that the agency was committed to “aid the juvenile fish migration” so long as it didn’t cause any loss of power generation.

The Act created an entity that Bonneville had to answer to, the Northwest Power and Conservation Council. The Council created the region’s Fish and Wildlife Program, and the Power Act told Bonneville to act “in a manner consistent” with the program. One of the Council’s earliest measures in the program requiring minimum flows to speed migrating smolts swiftly through the deadly reservoirs. Before the dams were built, smolts from Idaho could reach the ocean in at least 25 days. After the dams were built, the journey could take more than 50 days, with devastating impacts on the fish.

Bonneville has continually ignored the flow requirements. It has used fish flows in ways that maximized power production while hurting fish. It has paid millions to a University of Washington consultant named Jim Anderson who claims greater flows don’t help fish, despite overwhelming evidence that they do.

In 1986, NOAA Fisheries reviewed how well Bonneville was complying with the Power Act’s requirement that fish be given equal consideration to power at the agency. But NOAA reported that Bonneville’s priorities put salmon last, after power, flood control, irrigation and reservoir refill.

NOAA found that flows had not improved and that salmon survival was still just as “poor as ever.” Instead, Bonneville and the Army Corps of Engineers “created impediments” that “effectively eliminated” the benefits of flows for fish.

NOAA said that in the Upper Columbia, where Grand Coulee was supposed to be providing fish flows, fish needs were “preempted” by energy sales to outside entities.

This was a problem the Northwest Power Act was supposed to fix.

NOAA noted that Bonneville had added substantial staff to their fish and wildlife divisions, and was already disputing the expertise of agencies that were legally responsible for the fish.

The power interests were putting “all the risk” on fish.

Bonneville was even deciding what salmon protection measures are needed, and which to ignore.

Today, now two decades later, Bonneville is still not providing needed flows determined by NOAA, more than half the time. The next time Bonneville actually implement all the fishery agencies’ recommendations would be the first time in its history.

The trend line for salmon populations for the last 150 years is steeply downward and offers little hope of improvement given the multiple causes of decline.” — Greg Delwiche, Bonneville vice president

Bonneville protected salmon only if it “didn’t cause the loss of power production.” — Bonneville Administrator Sterling Munro, 1978

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**BETRAYALS OF TRUST**

(Continued from Page 8)

BPA cannot and will not attempt to meet all those needs whether identified in subbasin or recovery plans or other such plans.” Delwiche wrote.

The Power Act created the regional Northwest Power and Conservation Council to oversee the program. The Council set a goal of restoring 5 million fish to the basin by 2025 — a goal Delwiche says Bonneville cannot meet. “BPA funding at any level will not result in 5 million returning adults,” he says.

Delwiche says Bonneville is aware that “the trend line for salmon populations for the last 150 years is steeply downward and offers little hope of improvement given the multiple causes of decline.”

**“The trend line for salmon populations for the last 150 years is steeply downward and offers little hope of improvement given the multiple causes of decline.” — Greg Delwiche, Bonneville vice president**
REMEMBERING CELILO

The Benefits of Restoring Snake River Salmon

Breaching dams could save the region billions over 20 years

In 1947, Paul Needham of the Oregon Game Commission observed that if federal dam builders followed through with plans to build five new dams, including four on the Lower Snake River and one on the Columbia, the salmon would be lost.

"All western fishery biologists with whom I have talked agree that this plan, if followed, will spell the doom of salmon and steelhead migrations up the Snake River as well as up its best tributary, the Salmon River in Idaho," Needham wrote 60 years ago in Oregon Business Review.


The decline of Snake River salmon followed on their heels. The cohort went extinct in the 1980s, and the sockeye are down to the last handful of fish. The steelhead and Chinook are on the Endangered Species List.

In the 1990s, a citizen movement to take out the dams, or at least "breach" them so the Snake can run free again, took root in the Northwest. Breaching the dams was given serious study. NOAA Fisheries under the Clinton administration said dam breaching may be justified. Bruce Babbitt, Clinton's secretary of Interior, said the administration was leaning in that direction. "The clock just ran out on us," he said in an interview.

The Rand Corp., a private non-profit organization, said breaching makes economic sense. But the Army Corps of Engineers said it wasn't justified, and the idea was shelved, at least for a few years.

Further discussion of breaching quieted down as an energy crisis fueled by the extremely dry weather, the illegal activities of Enron and ill-considered power sales by Bonneville — forced electric rates skyrocket in the region in 2001.

But NOAA, which in its 2000 biological opinion promised to consider breaching if all else failed, may have no choice but to raise the possibility again. The runs above Bonneville have declined more than 50 percent since 2001, and indicators show a continuing slide for the long term.

Now there is a fourth study, by Save Our Wild Salmon, Taxpayers for Common Sense and other groups that are determined to revive the breaching debate. It has published a new study showing that restoring the Snake can save billions of dollars. Their study found that increased tourism, new outdoor recreation, and improved sport and commercial fishing opportunities could generate substantial additional revenue for the region.

But as soon as the report, entitled "Revenue Stream," was published in November 2006, it was met with some unfounded criticism by federal agencies and an electric utility group. NOAA Fisheries executive Bob Lohn said just by publishing it, the coalition had done more harm than good. But it's not clear he actually read the document.

"I'm afraid this probably does not further salmon recovery as I understand it," said Lohn. "The reason is that the report is clear, simple, elegantly prepared, but glosses over the underlying facts," he told the Northwest Power and Conservation Council.

It's not clear what facts Lohn was citing. He said, incorrectly, that the report claims the federal government would save about $600 million a year on salmon recovery programs if the dams came out. He also said the report assumes there would be no money for hatcheries and fish protection, also inaccurately.

Lohn said that the report assumes there would be "no Pacific coast salmon recovery funds for any part of the Columbia Basin, the Mitchell Act (federal hatch.

Northwest River Partners, a group of utilities, farmers and businesses, attacked the report with a number of additional claims that are also not true. It says salmon are already on the road to recovery, so dam removal is not needed.

"Regional efforts to aid salmon are working," the group said in a statement posted to its web site. "The effort is paying off."

Members of Northwest River Partners, which include PacifiCorp, Portland General Electric, Puget Sound Energy and Tacoma City Light, fear that the cost of power would rise. The actual rate impact is uncertain, but ratepayers would still enjoy some of the cheapest rates in the nation. Bonneville's rates are 53 percent below the market price.

The dams generate, on average, about 1,000 megawatts of power at any given moment. Replacing that power with wind and conservation would cost up to $170 million in new wind projects and energy efficiency programs in the region.

But Bonneville claims the dams are capable of generating a peak of 3,400 megawatts, and that it would cost more than $400 million a year to replace that capacity with gas-fired combustion turbines. But the Northwest Energy Coalition contends that the dams have been called on to generate that much power only once, in 1982, during a "very high spring run off." They say that if Bonneville had those turbines on hand, it would crank them up and sell the extra power to California. Bonneville also ignores the role consumers can play by conserving energy at times of the year when consumption is at its highest.

Dam breaching could also solve a vexing environmental problem for Lewiston, Idaho. In Revenue Stream, the groups note that the Snake River is filling up with sediment behind Lower Granite Dam, and could cause severe flooding in the city unless its waterfront levees are heightened.

The Army Corps of Engineers has begun hearings on its proposal to augments the levee.

Lower Granite traps enough sediment every year to raise the reservoir level about 3 inches. The top of the levee is now less than two feet above the reservoir.

The Army Corps could dredge the river every year, but that would cause harm to endangered salmon. The cost would be nearly $100 million, including the price of raising bridges and realigning streets and railroads.

Raised levees would also further remove Lewiston residents from the river, detracting from their quality of life. The proposal has drawn significant local opposition for this reason alone.

The report says the costs of keeping the dams in place could range from $1.65 billion to $11.9 billion over 20 years.

Revenue Stream found that breaching the dams may contribute to the economy in other ways. It would trigger between $1.8 billion and $10.5 billion in new recreation, sportfishing and commercial fishing, and would help fulfill Indian treaty fishing rights. It could infuse new jobs into fishing communities from California to Alaska that have been devastated by fishing closures.

The Northwest River Partners would rather save the salmon by stopping all fishing.

"This report points to an economic boom generated by helping people kill more fish," the organization says on its web site. "The report seeks to help the fishing industry sell boats, tackle, licenses, motel rooms and fishing equipment so that fishermen can kill returning salmon."

The hydropower system, however, kills many more salmon than fishing.
Gagging the salmon-counters

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service scientists who reported bad news about salmon survival in the Columbia are ordered not to talk

Let's say you have 2,000 salmon, and you divide them evenly into two groups.

You stand at the far end of Lower Granite Reservoir and release the first 1,000 down the river. The dams at reservoirs along the way kill between 500 and 700 of them. After three or four years in the ocean, just 10 return make it all the way back to Lower Granite.

You load the other 1,000 fish into Army Corps of Engineers' barges at Lower Granite Dam. The Army Corps, which has been barging fish through the dams since 1969, claims that barging as many salmon is best for the fish. Bonneville, which could receive substantial increases in revenue if barging helps restore the salmon, supports the program.

After passing the last dam, 980 of the fish are still alive in the barge. But after three or four years, only five of the barged salmon reach Lower Granite.

In other words, the barging method returns only half as many salmon as allowing fish to swim all the way to the ocean.

These results come from research sponsored by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the states of Oregon and Idaho, and the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission.

The combined trauma of dams, barges and poor ocean conditions are pushing the salmon toward extinction, the Comparative Survival Studies show. The doing what are needed to sustain the runs.

The $1 million-a-year studies, begun 10 years ago, could be critical to court-ordered recovery planning for the salmon - possibly showing for example what is working for the fish and what is not. For example the studies indicate that barged fish die twice as often as fish that swim in the river, making a case for halting the barging program, with some exceptions.

The studies also seem to indicate that salmon which have to pass eight dams do less well than fish that pass just one or two dams. This could bolster the argument in favor of dam breaching.

These results threaten Bonneville's hydro operations because they indicate that its current measures are not working, despite their annual $691 million price tag. They may mean that other measures must be considered, such as increased flows, more spill or dam removal, if the salmon are to spared.

Consequently, NOAA and Bonneville are doing what they can to silence the studies' authors and keep the Fish and Wildlife Service scientists and their data away from salmon recovery plans.

The rift has torn apart the nation's two leading fishery agencies, the Fish and Wildlife Service, and NOAA Fisheries, and once again exposes the Bush administration.

NOAA's approach is to count fish as they pass each dam - what fishery geeks refer to as “concrete to concrete.” They look at how successfully salmon cross each dam under various conditions, something that at least in theory should be easier to measure. But these data do not address fatal trauma to the fish that cause death until much later.

NOAA work on evaluating so-called “delayed mortality” lags far behind the Fish and Wildlife Service.

Fish and Wildlife Service scientist Howard Schaller, leader of the Comparative Survival Studies, declined to respond to questions about why he and others were kicked out of NOAA's biological opinion deliberations. "This is a closed-court-ordered process and I am not at liberty to discuss the specifics," he said.

The Fish and Wildlife Service is not commenting, or even confirming, the rift between the two agencies. It is, it is not cooperating with other agencies that participated in the Comparative Survival Studies. It is withholding its analysis of NOAA's model of salmon survival, known as COMPASS.

Even though the Fish and Wildlife Service and CRITFC have teamed up on the studies, the federal agency has decided to not share the analysis with the tribes.

The Bush administration, once again, is muzzling the scientists. This is the World Series. You don't take the A team out." — Nicole Cordan, Save our Wild Salmon

Approach for use in NOAA's biological opinion and submitted it for review. Schaller's approach, one source said, "is transparent and is populated with actual data, whereas (the NOAA model) is highly complex, not transparent and uses synthetic (assumed) flow and survival data."

But while the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is not releasing their report, other documents detail their concerns about NOAA and are freely available on the web.

One such document from February 2006 indicates that the Fish and Wildlife Service had concerns about "made up" data, among other things:

- NOAA should exercise caution "in the planning phase to prevent the development of a model that implies precision the underlying data can't support;"
- Model results for the McNary to Bonneville reach differed from actual estimates;
- It is questionable whether there is adequate data for COMPASS to make in-season decisions for fish passage;
- NOAA makes assumptions about dam survival in years and at projects where no studies have been conducted.
- NOAA's model appears to be creating data that do not exist and treating those data the same as data which have more of an empirical basis.

Bonneville's approach has been based on conditions the fish do not experience presently.

"Because most of these reservoir survival estimates are largely 'made up' based on non-tenable estimates of dam survival in non-studied years and within-season periods, the true sample size for investigating these relationships is greatly over inflated," the Comparative Survival Studies report stated.

The studies' leaders are seeking to expand the studies, by extending them to the Upper Columbia River and to steelhead. But Bonneville has refused to allow these additional experiments to go forward even though "these deficiencies have been caused largely by BPA policy decisions," according to the Independent Science Advisory Board, a panel that reports to NOAA Fisheries and the Northwest Power and Conservation Council.
Salmon runs and ancient fishing and burial sites all over the Columbia Basin have disappeared under the massive weight of the world’s largest hydro system. Dams kill tiny salmon by reducing flows that carry downstream migration through slow-moving and heated reservoirs, as they pass through turbines, spillways or bypass systems; by causing supersaturated gas in spillway discharges; through power peaking; by degrading spawning grounds; and by dewaterring salmon nests (redds), trapping tiny fish in isolated puddles. Dams also provide habitat for predators. These impacts accumulate at each dam.

Dams kill adults as well, including ones that “fall back” over spillways, through juvenile passage systems, or through turbines at the dams. Dams have blocked the salmon from reaching 55 percent of its historic range in the basin. In 1910, Swan Falls Dam blocked the Upper Snake to Shoshone Falls, a customary fishing site and a natural barrier to further salmon migration. In 1932 Owyhee Dam stopped salmon from reaching southeast Oregon, southern Idaho and northern Nevada. Grand Coulee Dam in 1941 stopped salmon from entering Canada, Chief Joseph Dam blocked the Upper Columbia in 1955, and Hells Canyon Dam blocked Hells Canyon in 1967.

Areas in the Basin where access for salmon is blocked by dams

Mid-Columbia River — Central Washington

Lower Columbia River — Oregon, Washington

BONNEVILLE DAM — Date completed: 1938
Power capacity: 1,077 megawatts
Owner: Army Corps of Engineers

Harm: Floods 48 miles of spawning habitat and numerous trout fishing sites east to The Dalles Dam. Notes: In the 1950s, scientists documented the migration behavior of Pacific salmon. It was built with no downstream juvenile bypass facilities. But because Bonneville Dam passed one million fish in the same year, the need for development of systems that salmon entrails could handle seven more dams.

The Dalles Dam — Date completed: 1957
Power capacity: 1,408 megawatts
Power capacity expanded: 1973
Owner: Army Corps of Engineers

Harm: Floods 24 miles of spawning habitat and trout fishing sites up to John Day Dam, including Hell’s Falls, Niman, Third dam on the Lower Columbia. Developments upstream of the reservoir could create fish species that could not survive the much larger, dammed reservoir. Built with no downstream juvenile bypass facilities.

HURRY DAM — Date completed: 1953
Power capacity: 880 megawatts
Power capacity expanded: 1973
Owner: Army Corps of Engineers

Harm: Floods 64 miles of important fall Chinook salmon spawning habitat and three fish ladder sites up John Day, including Hell’s Falls, Niman, Third dam on the Lower Columbia. Developments upstream of the reservoir could cause fish species that could not survive the much larger, dammed reservoir. Built with no downstream juvenile bypass facilities.

North Fork Clearwater River — Idaho

JOHN DAY DAM — Date completed: 1971
Power capacity: 2,250 megawatts
Owner: Army Corps of Engineers

Harm: Blocks wild steelhead access to upper Clearwater River watershed. Worked 39 miles of spawning river. Notes: One of the last free-flowing reaches of the Columbia River. The dam was built to suit summer and fall runs. Proposals to move the river even faster by lowering the water level have been rejected by the Bonneville.

Upper Columbia River — Northeast Washington, Southern British Columbia

REVELSTOKE DAM — Date completed: 1941
Power capacity: 1,808 megawatts
Owner: BC Hydro

Harm: Blocks wild steelhead access to upper Clearwater River watershed. Worked 39 miles of spawning river. Notes: One of the last free-flowing reaches of the Columbia River. The dam was built to suit summer and fall runs. Proposals to move the river even faster by lowering the water level have been rejected by the Bonneville.

LOWER MOKAHAU DAM — Date completed: 1938
Power capacity: 603 megawatts
Owner: Army Corps of Engineers

Harm: Floods 32 miles of salmon spawning habitat and treaty fishing sites east to Lower Monumental Dam. Notes: Built with no downstream juvenile bypass facilities. Experiments using barges to transport smolts downstream started here in 1968. In 2002, the Columbia River Treaty Commission argued that Ice Harbor Dam would prove less harmful to salmon. The hope is to restore the Snake River’s riverine habitat with millions of dollars.

STONEHAIGH POWER HOUSE — Date completed: 1971
Power capacity: 6,809 megawatts
Owner: State of Washington

Harm: Floods 51 miles of former salmon habitat and treaty fishing sites east to Lower Monumental Dam. Notes: Completely blocks salmon migration upstream.

Snake River — Eastern Washington

ICE HARBOR DAM — Power capacity: 1961
Power capacity expanded: 1976
Owner: Army Corps of Engineers

Harm: Floods 16 miles of spawning habitat and treaty fishing sites upstream to Little Goose Dam. Notes: The third highest dam in the world. The Dworshak hatchery is the largest steelhead hatchery in the world. The Dworshak Dam is driving the Kootenai River white sturgeon extinct and harming bull trout populations. It was built under the Columbia River Treaty with Canada that provided three large storage dams there: Dams, Kootenay and Mica, significantly harming salmon.

BRITISH COLUMBIA

Owen Valley Dam — Power capacity: 1927
Power capacity expanded: 1978
Owner: Army Corps of Engineers

Harm: Floods 30 miles of spawning habitat and treaty fishing sites east to Lower Granite Dam. Notes: The Army Corps of Engineers. Owen Valley Dam is one of the last free-flowing reaches of the Columbia. The dam was built to suit summer and fall runs. Proposals to move the river even faster by lowering the water level have been rejected by the Bonneville.

LOWER GRANITE DAM — Date completed: 1975
Power capacity: 1,010 megawatts
Power capacity expanded: 1976
Owner: State of Washington

Harm: Floods 37 miles of spawning habitat and treaty fishing sites upstream to Lower Monumental Dam. Notes: Completely blocks salmon migration upstream.

Kootenai River — Montana

LIBBY DAM — Date completed: 1979
Power capacity: 2,958 megawatts
Owner: Army Corps of Engineers

Harm: Floods 37 miles of salmon spawning habitat and treaty fishing sites east to Lower Granite Dam. Notes: Completely blocks salmon migration upstream.

Snake River — Idaho

ICE COLD CANYON DAM — Power capacity: 1964
Power capacity expanded: 1976
Owner: Army Corps of Engineers

Harm: Floods 60 miles of salmon spawning habitat and treaty fishing sites east to Lower Monumental Dam. Notes: Built with no downstream juvenile bypass facilities. Experiments using barges to transport smolts downstream started here in 1968. In 2002, the Columbia River Treaty Commission argued that Ice Harbor Dam would prove less harmful to salmon. The hope is to restore the Snake River’s riverine habitat with millions of dollars.

LITTLE GOOSE DAM — Date completed: 1971
Power capacity: 1,980 megawatts
Owner: Army Corps of Engineers

Harm: Floods 37 miles of spawning habitat and treaty fishing sites east to Lower Granite Dam. Notes: The Army Corps of Engineers. Owen Valley Dam is one of the last free-flowing reaches of the Columbia. The dam was built to suit summer and fall runs. Proposals to move the river even faster by lowering the water level have been rejected by the Bonneville.

LOWER GRANITE DAM — Date completed: 1975
Power capacity: 1,010 megawatts
Power capacity expanded: 1976
Owner: State of Washington

Harm: Floods 37 miles of spawning habitat and treaty fishing sites upstream to Lower Monumental Dam. Notes: Completely blocks salmon migration upstream.

Kootenai River — Montana

LIBBY DAM — Date completed: 1979
Power capacity: 2,958 megawatts
Owner: Army Corps of Engineers

Harm: Floods 37 miles of salmon spawning habitat and treaty fishing sites east to Lower Granite Dam. Notes: Completely blocks salmon migration upstream.

Lake Pend Oreille — Montana

LIBBY DAM — Date completed: 1979
Power capacity: 2,958 megawatts
Owner: Army Corps of Engineers

Harm: Floods 37 miles of salmon spawning habitat and treaty fishing sites east to Lower Granite Dam. Notes: Completely blocks salmon migration upstream.
Returning the Columbia's salmon to Canada

Canada lost almost all its Columbia River salmon 70 years ago, with the completion of Grand Coulee Dam. Now First Nation bands in British Columbia want to restore the salmon and their ancient fisheries that were taken away with no warning or compensation.

When the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation built Grand Coulee Dam, it failed to equip it with fish ladders to allow adult passage. And it did little if anything to let aboriginal groups in Canada know about the drastic changes ahead for their economy, and spiritual and cultural lives.

In 1955, the Army Corps of Engineers built a second barrier to salmon passage, Chief Joseph Dam, 51 miles downstream from Coulee. It also lacks fish passageways.

Today, the only Columbia River salmon reaching Canada is a sockeye run up the Okanagan River.

Grand Coulee cut off more than 1,000 miles of spawning habitat stretching deep into the Canadian Rockies. In the U.S., the dam flooded one of the most productive ancient fishing sites in the basin, Kettle Falls, as well as 20,000 acres of land where the tribes of the Colville Indian Reservation had been living for thousands of years.

Grand Coulee Dam's construction, salmon was an important food for First Nation people. More than 1 million salmon swam past the dam every year. One First Nation band, the Kutenai, harvested up to 75,000 Chinook, 15,000 sockeye, and 112,000 steelhead before the dam was built.

The call to return salmon to their lost habitat is getting louder.

In meetings in January and February in Spokane, the subject was the focus of a joint meeting between the Canadian Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission and its counterparts in the United States, the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission.

The Canadian Inter-Tribal group in 2003 petitioned the International Joint Commission (IJC) to make amends for the losses of salmon caused by Grand Coulee Dam. The commission, an independent bi-national organization established by the Boundary Waters Treaty of 1909, helps prevent and resolve disputes regarding the development and management of boundary waters between Canada and the United States.

"The cultural and spiritual relationship between our people and the salmon is a central and defining feature of our people's cultures and societies," said Fred Fortier of the Canadian CRITFC in a letter to the International Joint Commission.

Their petition asks the international commission to make suitable and adequate provision for protection and indemnification of the interests of "aboriginal peoples in Canada whose fisheries are alleged to have been damaged by the construction and operation of Grand Coulee Dam." West Coast Environmental Law, a Vancouver, B.C., group, says the dam raises human rights issues.

International law bans taking resources or the "means of subsistence" from aboriginal people without compensation.

Andrew Gage, a lawyer for West Coast Environmental Law, said "Grand Coulee destroyed the fishery of the indigenous peoples of the Upper Columbia who had historically depended upon that anadromous fishery for subsistence, livelihood and cultural purposes." — Andrew Gage, West Coast Environmental Law

There's no getting over this — Twin barriers to salmon, Grand Coulee Dam, above, and Chief Joseph Dam, left, were built without fish ladders to allow for passage. Coulee is 550 feet tall, while Joseph is 167 feet tall. They are the top two hydropower producers in the U.S.

Canadian CRITFC says the U.S. should restore the salmon by capturing adults below Chief Joseph Dam and planting their eggs in tributaries of the Columbia River in B.C. He also called for fish ladders on Chief Joseph and Grand Coulee.

The Northwest Power Act requires the region to evaluate the feasibility of restoring salmon to blocked areas.

Melinda Eden, a Council member from Portland, says.

One key question, obviously, is whether it is technically feasible to restore the Columbia's salmon to Canada.

"It can be done," Green says. "And the salmon are still important to the Kutenai. When I go to community meetings there are always a few elders there who recall when they used to go fishing. But there are fewer of them every year."

A 1996 study by the American CRITFC found that restoring salmon above Grand Coulee presents a "major bioengineering challenge." The study noted that salmon failed to completely scale the fish ladders at Pelton Dam on the Deschutes River in Central Oregon. That dam is 150 feet tall, and the fish ladders stretched for three miles.

Grand Coulee is 550 feet in height; Chief Joseph stands 167 feet tall.

Salmon on the Pelton Dam ladders could not survive the high water temperatures on the ladders in the summer sun. "After migrating upstream through a river system with elevated temperatures, adults used the three mile long ladder for holding and spawning, but failed to traverse the ladder and move upstream," the study said.

While adult passage over high head dams of greater than 90 feet has been accomplished through the use of locks, elevators, and trap and haul methods, these methods have maintained only small salmon populations upstream of these dams.

Heinith said an opportunity to review fish passage at Grand Coulee and Chief Joseph arises in 2014, when parties to the 1964 Columbia River Treaty between the U.S. and Canada can seek changes to the document.
Do the legendary “June Hogs” still exist?

In the lore of Columbia River salmon, the legend of the “June Hogs” stands apart.

June Hogs were said to be a line of supersalmon, capable of swimming 1,000 miles up the Columbia River and into Canada. They were reportedly as large as a small person, weighing 125 pounds or more.

Historical accounts say that adult summer Chinook had large energy reserves, produced large numbers of offspring, and were able to traverse the river and spawn in the late summer and fall north of the Canadian border.

These salmon probably migrated to sea as subyearlings, says Bob Heinith of the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission.

In 1941 Grand Coulee Dam blocked their route upstream. The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and the Army Corps of Engineers built Grand Coulee without fish ladders. Fourteen years later, the Army built Chief Joseph Dam 51 miles downstream, also without fish ladders.

Radio telemetry has tracked Chinook in the Upper Columbia all the way upstream to the Chief Joseph tailrace, the downstream part of the dam.

However, there are doubts about the legend of the June Hog. In 1995, NOAA Fisheries studied whether the remnant run of “June Hogs” is still in existence, warranted listing under the Endangered Species Act. The answer it gave was no.

“We found no empirical evidence indicating that a unique population of mass fish ever existed in the Columbia River,” NOAA said.

However, NOAA said that given the estimated large size of the Columbia River Chinook runs, “very large chinook salmon were undoubtedly common in the past. A few are occasionally observed today.”

It is possible that June hogs were simply the largest members of many different spawning populations, NOAA said. But by the early 1900s, overfishing had largely extinguished the majority of Columbia River chinook salmon, particularly the largest individuals.

Since 1977, the number of summer Chinook passing Wells Dam on the Upper Columbia has ranged from 1,343 in 1992 to 62,595 in 2002. In 2006, some 25,671 summer Chinook passed the dam.

The wild run appears to be all but extinct, but the hatchery run has been rebounding, with smaller ocean harvests and spill to aid juvenile migration at the five mid-Columbia dams.

And yet, the future of the summer run is now in greater doubt than ever. The state of Washington is planning to phase out the summer fish at hatcheries in favor of spring-run Chinook.

The Bonneville Power Administration claims it is maintaining steady streamflows through Hanford Reach near Richland, Washington so that the eggs and emerging baby Chinook salmon are protected in the last free-flowing segment of the Columbia River. The Hanford Reach supports the largest and most productive population of wild salmon remaining in the Pacific Northwest.

But even these fish are in great danger. “We’re losing a ton of fish — direct kills — from hydro operations,” says Bob Heinith, a biologist with the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission. “People ought to be just appalled.”

These large, mainstem-spawning fall Chinook are a cornerstone in efforts to preserve and restore widely depleted and at-risk Columbia Basin salmon stocks. Hanford fall Chinook are not listed under the Endangered Species Act, yet they also need protection. They are born in waters already contaminated from toxic effluent of the Hanford nuclear site.

Hydro facilities under the management of Bonneville and a public utility district upstream are killing tiny Chinook by raising and dropping the river level as little as 11 feet every day, according to a U.S. Fish and Wildlife report issued in August 2006.

During early spring, Grand Coulee shuts down the river every night to follow the public’s pattern of using the most power during the breakfast hours and the in the evening.

When the river drops, water is stored for usage later in the day. But this kills large numbers of tiny fish which are left to die in the desert sun on the hot rocks. Many more are trapped in tiny pools, where they die from lack of oxygen or are eaten by predators.

When the river rises, power production increases.

In 1988, power producers on the Upper Columbia, including Bonneville and the Grant County Public Utility District, agreed to provide sufficient flows to keep salmon nests (redds) covered with water during the fall and winter. But the pact, called the Vernita Bar Agreement, failed to protect baby fish emerging from the nests in spring. An amendment to the agreement in 2004 still fails to prevent the tiny fish from dying, according to a 2006 report from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Scientists with the Fish and Wildlife Service “conservatively” estimate that river fluctuations trapped 1.6 million fish in small pools of water during 2003, and of these nearly 1.3 million died. Additional fish died while exposed on the dry river bed. The greater the size and frequency of river fluctuations, the greater the death toll.

Scientists estimate that from 8 million to 28 million baby salmon are born each year in the Hanford Reach. In 2003, dam operations destroyed about 12 percent of the tiny fish. In other years, the death toll could range from 31 to 90 percent of the fish, the study says.

“People ought to be just appalled.”

Scientists estimate that from 8 million to 28 million baby salmon are born each year in the Hanford Reach. In 2003, dam operations destroyed about 12 percent of the tiny fish. In other years, the death toll could range from 31 to 90 percent of the fish, the study says.

The scale of these impacts imposed upon the fry population could reduce harvests of all adult Chinook populations in ocean and in-river fisheries by 9,000-170,000 fish, the study said. “These potential impacts represent large reductions in the allowable harvest of fall Chinook by commercial and sport ocean fisheries, and commercial, sport, and tribal treaty in-river fisheries.”

A separate study conducted by Grant County Public Utility District, estimated only about 500,000 fish were trapped in 2005. The utility owns two upstream dams, Priest Rapids and Wanapum. The Fish and Wildlife Service study demonstrated that Grant County’s results vastly underestimated the harm to the fish.

Heinith says Grant County is a big part of the problem. “They could help a lot by changing the river flows,” he said.

The Fish and Wildlife Service report noted that Hanford Reach fall Chinook is considered a critical “population” that may re-colonize nearby tributaries and mainstem areas in the future. Hanford fall Chinook are the primary stock supporting Columbia River Treaty Indian subsistence and commercial fisheries as well as non-Indian sport and commercial fisheries.

This stock makes significant economic contributions throughout the Pacific Northwest with ocean, sport and commercial fisheries through Canada and as far north as southeast Alaska. Alaska is so concerned that they co-sponsored the Fish and Wildlife Service study.

Between 1985 and 2001, the Hanford Reach produced about 16 percent of the Chinook salmon catch in Southeast Alaska, 9 percent of the North British Columbia catch, 7 percent of the Central British Columbia harvest, and 10 percent of the West Coast Vancouver Island catch.

The Hanford fall Chinook population remains strong because critical spawning and rearing habitats in the unimpounded Hanford Reach are largely intact.

The Fish and Wildlife Service study was designed to help guide development of sustainable escapement goals and fisheries by the Pacific Salmon Commission, Pacific Fisheries Management Council, and Columbia River Fish Management Plan under U.S. v. Oregon, an ongoing litigation that divides the Columbia’s annual catch 50-50 between tribal and non-tribal fisheries.

The observations of high mortality “in spite of the current protection measures” highlight the need for more measures that can protect the tiny salmon, the study says.
The dams took everything. The salmon, the village, the treasures, the sacred places. There was no compensation, just empty promises.

After Bonneville Dam blocked the river in 1938, burying many fishing places, the tribes were promised a new fishing place at Big Eddy, to replace what was lost. Government agents knew then, just as it is obvious now, that Big Eddy was the very place they would build The Dalles Dam two decades later. They didn't have to kill Celilo Falls. The Dalles Dam could have been built upstream from Celilo, sparing the fishing site, writes Katrine Barber, a Portland State University history professor, in her book Death of Celilo Falls. The Dalles Dam was once proposed to be a giant dam, on the order of Grand Coulee — and could have been erected at a point far upstream near Arlington, Ore., where steep canyon walls crowd each side of the river. For those who wished to destroy Indian fishing on the Columbia, particularly at Celilo, The Dalles site was the perfect location for the dam. And there were many who did.

Tommy Thompson, the great Wyam chief, would not look at the dam. He was born the year of the treaties, 1855, and died two years after Celilo died in 1899. Chief Thompson was 90 when Bruce Jim was born in the village of Wyam, also known as Celilo. He grew up a fisherman, and now as an elder he is a member of the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission, representing the tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of north central Oregon in the business of bringing back the salmon. Together their lives span the entire history since the 1855 treaties. These are his memories.

I was there right in the village with my grandfather. I had to pack some stuff up the hill for some people, and I came back down and I just kind of sat in the house, I didn't really watch. You can see pictures of people watching, but it was something for them too hard to watch, too hard to see, something they could never imagine taken away. I was sad because I could see my grandmothers and them being sad and crying and shedding tears, and my grandfather sitting quiet, talking low and everything else. You have that feeling of something lost. It wasn't as much of an impact on us, the young people, as it was the older people that lived their whole life there.

There are only a few village elders that are alive today like my mother Dorothy Sinnutus. There just aren't many people left, especially people from Warm Springs, that used to live down in Celilo. Who can tell the truth about Celilo history? Because of the dams going in, the Warm Springs tribes sent people down there to get people enrolled. Telling us if you don't enroll you aren't going to get any money that is given to the people. I say this because I was there in my grandfathers house. If you don't enroll in the reservation you don't get compensated. I always thought it was a wrong way of approaching it.

There were so many places that we went — Cascade locks, lone pine, Indian Head Rapids, John Day River. Even the Umatilla River, where the 3 mile dam is, we would go in and harvest what we could in there. Indian Head Rapids was one of the last fishing places two miles above John Day river. There were only four scaffolds there, of two of them were from our families. I used to see across to the other side the Yakama fishermen.

Losing that place and not getting compensated, not understanding why we didn't get compensated. It really kind of rested on my thoughts all the time. I got papers from my grandfathers and people who sued the Corps of Engineers for covering up our fishing places. They destroyed our fishing places, they destroyed our homes in the lower John Day River. Timutu Falls on the John Day River, the Corps of engineers blew it up.

You can see pictures of people watching, but it was something for them too hard to watch, too hard to see, something they could never imagine taken away.

I remember those old people there that lived there in fishing shacks in Tenino and Celilo. I can still picture the way the river ran by Tenino. The fishwheel was there. Even the dinosaur tracks in the rocks, dinosaur tracks were that deep, you could see how they walked. My uncle told me these tracks catch more fish than you. I know the Nez Perce were there, the Yakama, the Umatilla, but there was also Colville, the Pacific tribes. People from Montana used to come there. It was the only place Indian people could make money was fishing at that time. They came down and wanted to find places to fish. This was a sure way of getting quick money presented on a platter to them, because of the usual and accustomed places. Our people basically come from that area, that was our home, Warm Springs peoples' home, Wasco peoples' home.

When the treaty was made some stayed 12 months of the year, and in the 1940s they weren't on the rolls at that time. They had to be signed on, a lot of the families had chiefs who signed the treaty, and yet they weren't enrolled, and they came down and said you guys aren't getting anything because you aren't enrolled.

Bruce Jim, a member of the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission, was born at Celilo.

Which I always think was wrong. People can't tell me that didn't happen because I was there, I lived there until 1983 when I finally moved out, and moved to Warm Springs.

That was where me and my wife lived, we lived in Rufus and lived in Celilo. The first 6 years of life, I lived in Celilo. I remember my grandfather and grandmother were talking about this and what was going to happen.

As a young boy I had a dream. I heard a big rumbling and I heard a sound and I looked over there over the flat water and I see the falls coming back. He says that might happen in your time. I think it was just more or less a hope or a dream to see something like that disappear. I mean literally disappear.

Something that you would think could not be destroyed was taken away from us.

There was nothing that we cold do, and powerless to stop.

And I think that's what hurt them most of all was that to stand there and see this happening and what entity was responsible for agreeing to this.

And that's what they used to say, at lot they had no business to agreeing to this to sell our people off for the amount of money ($3,700) they were going to be given.

I know that's harsh words but that's the way our people looked at it down there in Celilo.

When I grew up down there as a young boy I used to go over to Big Island where my grandfather used to fish right next to the falls there, I'd get to go over there mostly to carry the fish.

We had a lot of adventures there as young people. I was spoiled in a sense by my grandfather because I could go anywhere I wanted to with him, even though my mother wouldn't let me. She said it was too dangerous to go over to the island.

When they talk about first fish, I had a little net my grandfather made me, a little hoop. There's a little falls right by the scaffolds, that blueback (sockeye salmon) used to jump up there. I would stand there by the falls and offer my net and I'd get the blueback.

One day my uncle Davis Thompson was standing there, and a big Chinook hit the falls, the falls was only 3 or 4 feet high, and went right into the net. I couldn't hold it, it took the net right out of my hand but my grandfather caught it below me and pulled it in. That was my first fish, my first salmon. I can always remember that day.
Chief Tommy Thompson: "I don’t want this dam project"

Chief Tommy Thompson's life spanned the whole last century in the life of Celilo Falls. In 1941, he told an interviewer for the U.S. Department of the Interior that his uncle, Stocket-ly, represented his people, at the 1855 treaty council. Upon Stocket-ly's death in about 1906, Tommy Thompson served as Chief at Celilo until his death in 1959, two years after the loss of Celilo.

He was 104.

During his and numerous other interviews, the department documented the last days of tribal fishing in the Northwest before the surge in dams over the next four decades inundated almost all the traditional sites.

The subjects were duly sworn, giving the department's report an investigative tone. Each interview was then translated into the third person.

To the Indians, Celilo was known as Wyam, and the people who lived there the Wy-Am-Pum. "The chief Tommy Thompson, then 79, a "full blooded member of the Wyam tribe," born at Celilo where his ancestors "had always lived and fished."

Chief Thompson first fished at Wyam at age 14, and elsewhere on the Columbia River, which in his language is known as Chee-wan-a, or Big Water in the white man's language," he said.

He fished at Skein, which means "cradle board," located immediately below the railroad bridge west of the falls, where fish were caught with spears and dip or bag nets, and many other locations up and down Chee-wan-a.

When he and the other Indians from Wyam would visit the other Indian fishing camps along the river, they "were all friends and joined each other in participating in Indian ceremonial dances and games of skill and chance."

The Natives lost more than salmon to the dams. They also lost their communities. Never were they compensated for these losses. They did receive $3,700 each for the loss of Celilo.

Most of the inhabitants of fishing villages along the river moved to the various reservations when Chief Thompson was about 20 years old, in accordance with the treaties. "The greatest number of them went to the Warm Springs Reservation, a few went to the Yakama Reservation, and probably less than 10 went to the Umatilla Reservation."

But Chief Thompson did not want to leave his own home despite the fact that his relatives selected an allotment for him at Warm Springs.

Members of other Indian tribes would visit Wyam to trade roots, berries and venison for dried salmon.

"If the visiting Indians did not have anything to trade for fish, the local people would either give them some of their own supply or else they would lend them the necessary equipment and permit them to catch all the fish they needed from one of the established fishing stations belonging to the local people. In other words, all the Indians were friends and shared their food and the means for obtaining the same with those who were less fortunate."

"The fishing platform locations on the banks of the river and on the rocks and islands in the river by the falls have been used by the local people from as long back as the Indians can remember. Those stations have been handed down from the older to the younger Indians of the same family from generation to generation. The chief of the local Indians was the one who would say who should use a place when there was no one in the family to whom it belonged capable of making use of it and that the decision by the chief was final and respected by all other Indians."

The chief of the Wyam Indians had always been a member of Thompson's family. His father's oldest brother, Stocket-ly, represented the Wyams at the 1855 treaty council. He signed the treaty on their behalf.

When he was a boy, as he remembered it, only about 25 Indians actually went out to the rocks to catch fish. By 1942, there were 200 Indians fishing during the heaviest part of the summer run. "In the old days, there were not as many controversies concerning who should use a particular fishing rock as there were plenty of such places for the number of Indians who thenfished," Chief Thompson said.

"There are still not enough places for all those who wish to fish at Wyam. On account of this, it is necessary to divide the use of some places among those who have fishing rocks which have been handed down in their family from generation to generation as long as the Indians remembered."

"The Indians nowadays and always have dried their fish in the open air in a shed which kept them from the rays of the sun, and they did not cure their fish by smoking them.

"In the old days the Indians would dry some of the fish they caught at all times through the spring and the fall runs, whereas today most of the drying for their own personal future use is done during the season when the Columbia River is closed to commercial fishing. That is the reason why the Indians, in order to survive under modern conditions, must sell the largest portion of their catch which is not eaten to have money available for the purchase of medicines and commodities."

"Large families would dry and put away for their own future use, about 30 sacks of fish, depending of course on the size of the family."

"The annual fish runs are not as large as they used to be because the white commercial fishing takes most of the fish from the river before they have a chance to come up to the Indians' fishing places. For that reason, the Indians as a whole do not obtain as much fish or revenue as they used to.

"The spring run of salmon in 1941 seemed to be quite small, and not nearly as heavy as the spring runs of a few years ago. The fall run for that year was quite good and although he did not catch many fish because of personal sickness, my grandchildren and other relatives were fairly successful in their fishing operations."

Chief Thompson strongly opposed the construction of The Dalles Dam, which would destroy Celilo Falls and the fishery. In a 1946 letter to Jasper Elliott, Superintendent of the Warm Springs Reservation, written from his home in Celilo, he said:

"So much trouble at hand, but I got to fight for freedom of what belongs to me and all Indians in the nation throughout the world. We were robbed out of everything. But, I am going to cling to my fishing industry — I am not quitting on closed season, for I know I live here year round. All I got is salmon to live on. I don't want this dam project either. There are lots of other rivers, streams for dams."

In her 2006 book, Death of Celilo Falls, Karine Barber says Chief Thompson spent the day Celilo died in a Hood River rest home. In other words, all the Indians were friends and shared their food and the means for obtaining the same with those who were less fortunate.

"The fishing platform locations on the banks of the river and on the rocks and islands in the river by the falls have been used by the local people from as long back as the Indians can remember. Those stations have been handed down from the older to the younger Indians of the same family from generation to generation. The chief of the local Indians was the one who would say who should use a place when there was no one in the family to whom it belonged capable of making use of it and that the decision by the chief was final and respected by all other Indians."

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Bush’s Shell game threatens world's largest sockeye runs

Enormous mining, oil and gas developments proposed in Bristol Bay environment

With the Columbia River no longer the world’s most productive salmon stream, the rivers that feed Alaska’s Bristol Bay have moved up to No. 1. But their reign may be in trouble. Massive mining, oil and gas development proposals are targeting the Bristol Bay environment and are moving ahead.

In the headwaters of two Bristol Bay watersheds, Nushagak River and Kvichak River, a Canadian company wants to build one of the largest gold and copper mines in the world. The proposal entails a large open pit where cyanide will be used to separate gold from the ore, an underground mine, and the removal of water from important fish habitats in the headwaters.

Northern Dynasty Mines, Inc. proposes building the Pebble Project in the Bristol Bay headwaters. The pit would be close to two miles in diameter and more than 1,600 feet deep and some proposals from the mining company show a footprint spanning 20 square miles, the size of the island of Manhattan.

“The proposed open-pit Pebble Mine, and the more than 1,000 square miles of additional mining claims staked throughout the Bristol Bay’s headwaters, pose an enormous threat to salmon habitat, fish populations and the Wild Alaska Salmon brand,” said David Harsila, president of the Alaska Independent Fisherman’s Marketing Association.

“Just the specter of a gigantic open pit gold and copper mine at the headwaters of the Bristol Bay is enough by itself to ruin the wild Alaska salmon marketing plan,” Harsila said. “These schemes pose a grave threat to pure water, Wild Alaska Salmon, and the tens of thousands of jobs they sustain.”

Out in Bristol Bay, Shell is the leading player bidding for the rights to explore for oil and gas when bidding opens in July or August. Five former top Bush administration officials are on Shell’s payroll, including former Interior Secretary Gail Norton, who supervised the federal oil drilling program when she was in office for the first six years of Bush’s term. Norton’s special assistant for Alaska at Interior, Cam Tooley, is working for Shell on oil development in Alaska.

Shell’s team also includes Elizabeth Stolpe, who came to the White House Council on Environmental Quality from Koch Industries, a Kansas oil company with a long history of EPA entanglements. In 2000, Koch paid the largest civil fine ever imposed on a company under any federal environmental law to resolve claims related to more than 300 oil spills from its pipelines and oil facilities in six states.

Others on the Shell team include Brian Malmak, a former associate communications director at Interior under Norton; and Kevin O’Donovan, a former domestic policy adviser to vice president Dick Cheney who was responsible for his climate change and energy policy, and who was deeply involved in Cheney’s secret energy task force early in Bush’s first term.

With that team in place, tribal, fishing and conservation groups are worried that salmon and other fisheries in the bay will be devastated.

Drilling would occur directly on top of the world’s largest salmon runs, the Bristol Bay sockeye.

Tribal and conservation groups were already wary of Shell, given its poor environmental record on Sakhalin Island in Russia’s far east, says Norm Anderson, a native Aleut who lives a subsistence lifestyle and works as a commercial fisherman.

“Over the years we were approached by oil companies for a stamp of approval on (this) lease,” he said. When asked to put its promises of local hiring and environmental stewardship in writing, the companies—refused.

“We know it’s not a question of if, but when there will be a major oil spill.” The losses from the Exxon Valdez spill, he said, were massive.

“We plan seven generations into the future to assure our people have an ability to live a subsistence lifestyle. The tribal people are standing up and saying we don’t want this to happen.”

The proposed Pebble Mine, he said, would be built right next to us. Bristol Bay occupies over 33 million acres of open sea, islands and estuaries just north of where the Aleutian Islands meet the Alaskan mainland.

The Bristol Bay watershed is an intricate system of lakes, streams, and rivers southwest of Anchorage that remains remarkably unchanged by human activity. The watershed is an integral part of the state’s economy and has provided sustainable jobs, subsistence foods, and other benefits to Native Alaskans——including the Yupik Eskimos, Aleuts and Athabascan Indians——for generations.

Bristol Bay’s sockeye runs, produced by numerous lakes, rivers and creeks, exceeded 43 million wild fish in 2004, yielding a harvest of about 25 million sockeye, worth some $350 million to the local economy.

Annual harvests, though, can fluctuate wildly, ranging from 1 million in 1973 to 40 million 10 years later.

The Kvichak River is home to the single largest salmon run on the planet. The Kvichak River hosts the largest king (Chinook) salmon run in Alaska.

Overall, fishing in Bristol Bay has an estimated net value of as much as $10 billion, including catches salmon, halibut and pollock, and providing some 12,500 jobs. The area is also important to sport fishermen, who spend about $120 million a year. The area also includes Alaska’s first designated trophy trout area, attracting more wilderness recreation than any other area of the state.

Whit Sheard, Alaska Program Director for Pacific Environment, a conservation group based in San Francisco, said the fisheries are threatened by developers’ plans to build 20 exploratory wells, 200 production wells, four to six drilling platforms, and 150 miles of offshore and 50 miles of onshore pipeline. They would make 18 vessel trips per week. Total production, he said, would supply the U.S. market with about 23 days worth of oil.

“Squandering the ecological resources of Bristol Bay for a short term oil and gas fix is a sure sign that the Bush Administration is still addicted to oil. It’s time the American public staged an intervention,” said Sheard, who joined dozens of other Alaska conservation groups, fisherman, and native communities in signing an open letter to the President urging him to uphold Bristol Bay’s protected status.

Bristol Bay was originally opened to oil leasing in the late 1980s but public outrage forced the government to buy back $95 million worth of leases. President Bush lifted the drilling ban on Jan. 7.

Five former top Bush administration officials are on Shell’s payroll, including former Interior Secretary Gail Norton, who supervised the federal oil drilling program for the first six years of Bush’s term.
Bush's Shell Game
(Continued from Page 18)

2007, clearing the way for the Interior Department to open the waters to oil and natural gas development. He took the action on the same day that the trans-Alaska oil pipeline was taken offline after a spill of up to 500 gallons. In the furor following the Exxon Valdez oil spill in 1989, the bay was placed off limits to drilling, first by Congress, and then, in 1998, by President Clinton. The presidential drilling ban was not scheduled to expire until 2012.

The Interior Department last year estimated energy development could produce up to 11,500 jobs and new tax revenue for the state. As currently envisioned by Shell, its project would include offshore platforms and subsea pipelines in the heart of the nation's largest fishery and endangered whale habitat, an overland pipeline across a national wildlife refuge, a natural gas liquefaction plant on the remote Alaskan Peninsula, and tankers transiting endangered Steller sea lion critical habitat.

The Interior Department estimates that there are approximately 23 trillion cubic feet of natural gas reserves in Bristol Bay. "There will be significant opportunities for study and public comment before any oil and gas development could take place," said Interior Secretary Dirk Kempthorne.

Shell's Sakhalin II project in the neighboring Russian Far East has become one of the most controversial oil and gas projects in the world. The Russian government is currently investigating Shell's history of environmental violations and social impacts. These include threatening the western Pacific gray whale with extinction, damaging wild salmon rivers and impacting fisheries that sustain one-third of the island's economy.

"Sakhalin II is widely recognized as an ecological and economic debacle," said Doug Norton of Pacific Environment. "It doesn't surprise me that Shell is pushing to drill in the heart of important fisheries and critical habitat for highly imperiled whales - their behavior on Sakhalin Island provide a very painful example of what they've got planned for Alaska.

Editor's Note: For more information about the Bristol Bay ecosystem, we recommend a video produced by Lance Holter of the Sierra Club. To contact Holter, you can email him at holter@maui.net.

Pacificorp backs away from dam removal on the Klamath River

Feds require utility to let salmon pass dams for first time since 1917, but will it be enough?

Last August, Pacificorp President Bill Fehrman said the company, a utility based in Portland, Ore., would consider removing its dams from the Klamath River.

As members of the Karuk, Hoopa, Yurok and Klamath Tribes protested at an international hydropower industry symposium in Portland, Fehrman released a statement that said, "We have heard the Tribes' concerns. We are not opposed to dam removal or other settlement opportunities as long as our customers are not harmed and our property rights are respected." But now, the company says the dams will probably remain in place, and instead will install obey a federal agency's requirement that it install fish ladders for adult passage at four of its Klamath River dams.

If the ladders work, and the dams successfully pass juvenile salmon downstream, and if water quality and quantity are sufficient — three big ifs — then salmon will return to the upper Klamath Basin for the first time since 1917. Dams have blocked or impeded access to more than 350 miles of historic habitats since Pacificorp's Copco 1 Dam was completed.

The four dams provide little power — only 116 megawatts. "Given that the Department of Interior has a legal responsibility to protect Tribal Trust resources, they have little choice but to do everything in their power to bring our salmon home," says Alan Foreman, chairman of the Klamath Tribes of Oregon. The Klamath Tribes of Oregon have not fished for salmon since 1917, when the first dam was built.

"The agencies do not have the authority to mandate dam removal, but FERC does," Foreman says.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and NOAA Fisheries do have the authority to demand ladders and increased stream flows in order to protect and restore salmon. But according to many tribal members and experts, the installation of fish ladders does not go far enough.

Klamath Basin Tribes and other dam removal advocates are pleased since the cost of the prescribed ladders and fishways makes dam removal an economically favorable alternative to relicensing.

"We applaud the Departments of Commerce and Interior for fulfilling their obligation to protect and restore the Klamath River," said Leaf Hillman, Vice Chairman of the Karuk Tribe. "Now it's time for Pacificorp President Bill Fehrman to make good on his commitment to protect his ratepayers from higher costs and simply remove these fish killing dams."

As Yurok Tribal consultant Troy Fletcher notes, "the construction of ladders on these relics will cost hundreds of millions of dollars. That money would be better spent to remove the lower four dams in order to protect our salmon and our local economies."

Susan Corum, a Karuk water quality expert, adds that "ladders do not address the toxic algae blooms that threaten those of us who live downstream." In the summer of 2005, Microcystis aeruginosa blooms in the reservoirs exceeded the World Health Organization standard for moderate risk by over 100 fold.

"Pacificorp's Klamath dams are poor producers of electricity, provide little flood control, and do not divert water for agriculture or drinking. All they do well is kill fish and breed toxic blue green algae. They must be removed," says Hillman.

"We cannot restore salmon without improving water quality and providing access to spawning habitat. The only way to do that is by removing those dams," according to Glen Spain of the Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations.

Portland based Pacificorp filed an appeal to Federal Agencies' mandate to construct ladders on the Klamath Dams. Pacificorp wanted to trap full-run Chinook salmon at Iron Gate dam and drive them 80 miles to Klamath Falls, Ore. Pacificorp did not propose passage for coho, steelhead, or Pacific lamprey, all important parts of native diets. "Pacificorp's plan is to relicense the dams on the cheap. Trap and haul will do little for Chinook salmon and do absolutely nothing to accommodate threatened Coho, steelhead or lamprey," according Taz Sota, fisheries biologist for the Karuk Tribe. "And that means that their management of the river will continue to harm Native American people in the Klamath Basin."

According to Karuk Tribe Vice chairman Leaf Hillman, "Despite the fact that all fish communities from Southern California to Northern Oregon are desperate to see Klamath salmon runs restored, Pacificorp continues to fight effective restoration efforts."

"Since this relicensing process began, Pacificorp has fought for status quo even though that spells disaster for Klamath communities," adds Hillman.

The Karuk Tribe is the second largest in California with over 3,400 members. "Last year we caught less than 200 fish...that's not enough to provide food for our ceremonies and dances much less feed our members," said tribal fisher Ron Reed.

Recently the sale of Pacificorp to Des Moines, Iowa based Mid-American Energy Holdings, Co. was completed. Mid-American is controlled by Berkshire Hathaway Co., of which Warren Buffett is the CEO and largest shareholder. Members of Buffett's family have been supporters of Ecotrust, a Portland-based organization that sponsors many salmon recovery efforts around the Pacific Rim, and published the books Salmon Nation and the Atlas of Pacific Salmon.
Editorial: Celilo Falls 50 Years Later
By Brent Foster
Executive Director of Columbia Riverkeeper

If there was one day which has defined the U.S. government's treatment of the Columbia River for the last 100 years it would be March 10, 1957. On this day, the closing of the floodgates at The Dalles Dam pushed the Columbia's waters up over the top of Celilo Falls flooding what was likely the single most dramatic feature of the Columbia River.

But when Celilo Falls was inundated 50 years ago, it had ramifications that echoed throughout the Columbia River Basin. It was a sign of just how far the U.S. government was willing to go in the race to turn the Columbia into electricity, aluminum and national power.

What happened to Celilo Falls was in many ways not unique. Not far downstream of Celilo or "Wyam" as it is known to Columbia Basin tribes, the once fierce Cascade Rapids sits flooded under the slow backwaters of Bonneville Dam. Upstream of Celilo the great Kettle Falls is similarly buried behind the restrained waters of the massive Grand Coulee Dam.

All along the Columbia the dam building frenzy of the last 50 plus years has come at the cost of the Columbia's most sacred places and the tribal cultures which had depended and continue to depend on the Columbia.

The actual price of a cheap kilowatt of electricity, a cheap gallon of water for agriculture or cheap flood protection can never be measured in dollars, but only in sadness, loss and a legacy of shame that our culture of progress will have to carry until we make it right.

As a white conservationist who fell in love with Celilo Falls only through photographs, video and stories, I would never try to articulate what the loss of Celilo Falls and the many other features of the Columbia means to the people that lived with a wild Columbia River for over 10,000 years.

I will not try to explain what it feels like when the salmon are so few in number that they must be bought for traditional ceremonies. I cannot reflect on what it was like to lose the ability to drink freely from the Great River of the West while fishing at Celilo Falls.

But 50 years after the flooding of Celilo it is impossible to ignore the reality that the treatment of Celilo Falls and the Columbia River's first people was symbolic of how federal and state governments valued the entire Columbia River and its first people.

In many ways this same perverse view of the relationship for the next 100 years is entirely within our power. While the flooding of Celilo Falls and the other great rapids, falls and contours of the Columbia is under ambitious given the magnitude of the toxic threats on the Columbia, EPA's northwest offices have been able to spearhead any toxics reduction effort under the Bush Administration is impressive. That said, EPA and the tribal, state and non-profit entities including Columbia Riverkeeper, that are involved in this toxics reduction effort will only deserve credit if we make tangible accomplishments. More plans, more talk and more good intentions alone will do nothing to decrease the concentration of toxics that are occurring in the Columbia's fish, sediment and waters.

While the flooding of Celilo Falls may be reflective of how federal and state governments have treated the Columbia for the last 100 years it is entirely within our power to redefine this relationship for the next 100 years. The flooding of Celilo Falls and the other great rapid, falls and contours of the free-flowing Columbia is a story of abuse and arrogance, but also one that reflects the great power that humans have to change and shape a river to reflect their values.

"Restoring the Columbia River to reflect a better balance of our values that includes clean water, vibrant runs of salmon, and a respect for tribal treaty rights, will not be cheap, easy, or quick, but it is well within our power." — Brent Foster

A tribal fisher pushes his dipnet deep into the raging river with the falls covering him with spray, in this 1955 photo. Photograph: Lafie Foster. From the collection of Beth Koch — Windows on the Gorge Photography. Courtesy Columbia Riverkeeper.
DEATH OF CELILO FALLS — By Katrine Barber (University of Washington Press 2005)

The story of ordinary lives in extraordinary circumstances, as neighboring communities go through tremendous economic, environmental and cultural change in a brief period. Katrine Barber, a history professor at Portland State University, examines the negotiations and controversies that took place during the planning and construction of The Dalles Dam, and the profound impact the project has on both the Indian community of Celilo Village and the non-Indian town of The Dalles, intertwined with treaty rights and federal Indian policy. Her account provides fascinating details of the life of Wyam Chief Tommy Thompson as he faced the dramatic changes at Celilo Falls.


The story of the Indians going to court to protect the salmon and their ancient right to harvest them. For more than 150 years, the Indian people have been in the eye of a legal storm that contested the face of the fisheries. They sought the moral compass that guided this law to favor the fish. Slowly, their sympathetic view of the salmon and their fisheries have been incorporated into law. This account contains excellent images, including the cover photo of an Indian boy rescued on the river and historic drawings of tribal leaders.


In 1939, the U.S. government promised to provide Columbia River Indians with replacements for traditional fishing sites flooded in the backwaters of Bonneville Dam. Roberta Ulrich, a former reporter for UPI and The Oregonian, recounts the Indians' struggle in the courts and on the river, as they try to persuade the government to keep its promises. Her account describes the disastrous effects on a salmon-dependent culture and portrays the plight of Indian families. Descendants of those to whom promises were made reveal the remarkable patience and resilience of Columbia River Indians.


This account examines the issues surrounding the development of salmon hatcheries on the Columbia River and the accession of the treaty tribes to the status of co-manager of the salmon. The book traces the history of artificial production programs after the passage of the Mitchell Act in 1938, tribal involvement in Columbia River salmon management following the United States v. Oregon court case in 1969, and the formation of the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission in 1977. Dompier explains how state and federal fishery agencies used hatcheries to gain control of the salmon resources at the expense of Columbia basin treaty tribes and the salmon itself. Dompier served as a policy analyst for CRITFC.
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