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PUBLIC MEETING SESSION
U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS
DRAFT LOWER SNAKE RIVER JUVENILE SALMON MIGRATION
FEASIBILITY REPORT/ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT
WITH
FEDERAL CAUCUS CONSERVATION OF COLUMBIA BASIN FISH
“ALL H-PAPER”

MISSOULA, MONTANA

PUBLIC COMMENT SESSION
MARCH 2, 2000

TRANSCRIBED BY NANCY J. SMITH

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1 MR. JAMES: My name's Bill James, and I'm a graduate student at the
2 University of Montana. I was raised in western Montana. The region needs a recovery
3 plan with a clear vision, goals and priorities. We need a plan that rebuilds healthy fish
4 runs while maintaining a healthy economy.

5 I oppose dam breaching. This is not a fish vs. economy issue for me. Fish
6 are important. The economy is important. And if both are important, breaching the dams
7 is not the simple answer. Twenty-six coast runs of salmon and steelhead are listed under
8 the ESA. Another eight are either candidates or proposed for listing. Of these 34 runs,
9 only four pass the Snake River dams.

10 Dam removal is not the answer to saving salmon in the Northwest. We
11 should focus on the broader common issues. Ten years ago, the best scientific
12 information said that only ten to 30 percent of salmon run smolts survived the trip past the
13 dams. Today, the National Marine Fisheries service says that the survival is as high as it
14 was in the 60's and 70's before the dams were built.

15 If survival through the reservoirs is as high as it is now, as it was before the
16 Snake River dams were built, returning to pre-dam conditions is not the answer. Dam
17 removal is not the silver bullet.

18 It is extreme and it is risky. It may not help the fish, but it will certainly hurt
19 the economy, our jobs and our Northwest way of life are at stake.

20 Dam breaching will create significant negative and environmental impacts
21 with loss of habitat for resident fish and wildlife and increased air pollution from trucks
22 and from fossil fuel-burning power plants.

23 I oppose alternative four, the dam breaching alternative for the reasons
24 stated above. The EIS asks the wrong questions. The question should be what is the
25 best way to rebuild fish runs throughout the region, not can we breach the dams.

1 The EIS shows that there are uncertain biological benefits from breaching
2 dams. Although we believe the negative economic impacts are seriously understated,
3 the EIS shows that there is certain economic harm.

4 THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

5 MR. STERGIES: Okay. My name is Steve Stergies, and I live here in
6 Missoula. My address is 510 Plymouth Street. Phone number is 549-3401. I've been a
7 salmon fisherman and a steelhead fisherman and a fisherman all my life.

8 Years ago, we caught plenty of salmon in Idaho around Challis and so on.
9 Every year it seems like there's less and less salmon, yet every year it seems like
10 millions and millions of dollars are spent to preserve the salmon and to bring them
11 forward. Now, we've conducted studies until hell freezes over.

12 But by gosh, there's less and less salmon, so whatever we're doing, we're
13 doing it wrong. And I think it's time to take a look at this thing and examine it. And it
14 looks like this removal of the dams is a good answer. As I see it now, my mind has been
15 changed. I used to oppose the Indians netting. Now I find that the only real stalwart that
16 stands up for the salmon is the Indian tribes.

17 I'm not an Indian, but by golly, these people, this is their heritage. And
18 incidentally, we have eight dams. And before the dams, there were millions of salmon
19 came up this river, and have for centuries and centuries and centuries. I think the dams
20 should be removed.

21 It seems like the first four dams are not a problem. Thereafter, we find a
22 problem. Now, something has got to change, but I think studying how much more do we
23 need -- and I think it's time to start looking at this thing realistically from the standpoint of
24 what is good for the salmon and get rid of some of this stuff with corporate structures and
25 power struggles and so on. The political possibilities are endless. And I understand that

1 in Lewiston at the last meeting, the legislators there or the politicians there walked out,
2 didn't even listen. Frankly, I think they better open up -- open up their ears and listen. I
3 hope we can progress in a forward motion and an affirmative way. Thank you.

4 MR. DUNCAN: My name's David Duncan. I was a life-long Oregonian until
5 our salmon were gone, then I moved to Montana. I live in Lolo, Montana. When my
6 father's generation had finished serving in Europe during World War II, many of the
7 troops were asked to fill out questionnaires saying what they most looked forward to
8 returning home.

9 Women topped the national list, baseball was huge, but among GI's from
10 the west, soldier after soldier spoke of the yearning to spend time on the rivers and in
11 mountains, camping, hunting and catching salmon and trout. Man after man spoke of
12 this as his most underestimated pre-war enjoy.

13 When they returned home, there was a surprise waiting. An arm's race with
14 Russia began laying waste to so many resources and so many of the wild places the
15 troops had loved. But this brutal race earned a name: The Cold War. The four dams on
16 the Snake are monuments of this war.

17 They were conceived at its hysterical height. They were bitterly opposed for
18 the damage they were sure to inflict on the salmon-dependent Northwest by President
19 Eisenhower, by the Army Corps that later built them, by the Oregon and Washington
20 Departments of Fish & Game, by the region's 13 native tribes, by the west coast's then
21 multi-billion dollar fishing industry.

22 The argument that tipped a 1955 cold war congress's thinking into
23 approving the dams was their proximity to Hanford. A meaningless fact, really, but there
24 was a childish militaristic tidiness at work in political imaginations that simply failed to
25 take salmon, salmon culture, and wistful GI's like my father into account.

1 When the dams finally came on line, our salmon runs, as predicted,
2 crashed. And the men of my father's generation began to lose one of the treasures they
3 valued most. It's easy to forget the excesses of the cold war. This is the era that gave us
4 the Nevada nuclear test sites, Rocky Flats, the Hanford nuclear leak site, anthrax, 3.5
5 trillion lethal doses of nerve agent released by the Pentagon into Mormon and Navajo
6 populated deserts, thousands of Army troops forced to stand or lie in fresh atomic fallout,
7 millions of civilians unwittingly exposed to the same fallout, encephalitis-carrying
8 mosquitos released by defense department scientists upon civilian volunteers, 45,000
9 American radioactive sites to this day.

10 1,140 uranium mining sites in Utah alone. A present day epidemic of
11 cancers for which we will never be able to hold their defense department progenitors
12 accountable. The dams on the Snake are a product of this era. Their run-of-the-river
13 design yields no flood control storage.

14 They overheat and strangle this desert river in summer when coolness in
15 current are crucial to salmonid life. The irrigation they provide is not in jeopardy. A
16 10,000 year-old culture and a national biological treasure are.

17 This world in arms, General and President Eisenhower said of the Cold War,
18 is not spending money alone, it is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its
19 scientists, the hope of its children.

20 This is not a way of life at all in any true sense. Under the cloud of
21 threatening of war, it is humanity hanging from an iron cross. The Soviet Union is
22 dissolved. The Cold War is won.

23 Yet salmon, the Northwest tribal and fishing cultures, the treasure of my
24 father and thousands of World War II GI's like him, remain on an iron cross. Five percent
25 of a region's hydropower is not strategic. Its biological and spiritual web of life is.

1 Lewiston, Idaho, can ignore its railways and highways and enjoy a piddling
2 wheat barging operation, or the interior west can continue to have wild Pacific salmon,
3 native culture, and a GI treasure. It's time to win back the peace and unbuild [sic] these
4 dams. Thank you.

5 MR. GARDNER: My name is Phil Gardner from Lolo, Montana. Thanks for
6 this opportunity. 10,000 B.C., Celilo Falls along the Columbia River represented a hub of
7 humanity for over 11,000 years, 550 generations. The largest gathering point west of
8 the Mississippi.

9 Each summer and autumn until the white race arrived from Europe. From
10 Celilo Falls radiated the religion, the philosophy and the economy of an entire people.
11 The focal point for these people was the great anadromous fish. The salmon and
12 steelhead.

13 1855. The Yakima treaty was established to guarantee tribal members the
14 right to fish at their usual and accustomed places. The tribes ceded most of their lands
15 for this right. 1942. The U.S. Supreme Court held that the state of Washington could not
16 impose a state license fee on Indian fishermen.

17 1967. Federal Judge Robert Bologna ruled in favor of David Sohappy vs.
18 Oregon, and upheld Indian fishing rights in a landmark decision. Judge Bologna also
19 attempted to articulate the quantity of fish to which the tribes were entitled. He concluded
20 that the state must conduct its regulatory practices to ensure that a fair and equitable --
21 that a fair and equitable share of the salmon and steelhead runs would reach Indian
22 fishing sites.

23 Since 1974, federal Judge George Boldt, an Eisenhower appointee, ruled
24 that Indian fishers were entitled to the opportunity to take 50 percent of all salmon and
25 steelhead that passed by their off-reservation sites. The decision was appealed and

1 upheld by the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. The U.S. Supreme Court refused to review
2 the case until the state of Washington, under the leadership of then attorney general
3 Slade Gorton, refused to obey the Boldt decision.

4 1979. The U.S. Supreme Court took the case and substantially affirmed all
5 significant aspects of the Boldt decision. The court took the opportunity to comment.
6 Except for some desegregation cases, the district court has faced the most concerted
7 efforts to frustrated decree of federal court witnessed in this century.

8 2017. The predicted extinction of all the inland west wild salmon is
9 predicted. The execution of perhaps the most heroic of all species. Like the American
10 bison purposely slaughtered on the Great Plains a century ago, the salmon is swirling
11 towards a similar demise. Elders of the Nez Perce Tribe believes the fates of humans
12 and salmons are linked. The good news. According to a combined NMFS and Army
13 Corps of Engineers report, breaching the four Snake River dams gives salmon an 80 to
14 100 percent chance of flourishing. A thriving Chinook population in the Hanford reach
15 gets proof that the lower Columbia dams can be negotiated by salmon. The four Snake
16 River dams were created under Cold War paranoia opposed by Eisenhower and the
17 Army Corps of Engineers who later built them.

18 The dams represent a boondoggle for a pitiful few. The four Snake River
19 dams represent a suffocation of salmon and the drowning of a culture which has thrived
20 for 11,000 years.

21 These dams are a fatal insult to our native citizens. In a relationship
22 highlighted by brutal imperialism, despicable dishonesty toward signed and even ethnic
23 cleansing, I for one am sick of this racism.

24 Breaching the four Snake River dams would go a long way in honoring the
25 Yakima treaty of 1855.

1 MR. SOUSA: My name's Mike Sousa, S-o-u-s-a. I'm from Missoula,
2 Montana. I'm for breaching of the dams on the Snake River for the following reasons.
3 Number one, I believe that the dams were initially constructed in error. I think we were --
4 the Army Corps of Engineers and others were of good intention when they built the dams,
5 however, it has become obvious that they have become somewhat of an ecological
6 nightmare with regard to salmon populations.

7 It may also be -- although it may also be too late to restore the wild salmon
8 runs in the reaches beyond the dams, I do believe that if there's one scintilla of a chance
9 to restore those runs, then the dams should be breached.

10 I would, however, caution that before any breaching be completed, that a
11 complete evaluation of the impact to the individuals living in the local areas be made.

12 In an era in which we have substantial budget surpluses, I do believe we
13 could allocate funds for education, infrastructure, retraining, and development of
14 alternative water sources for ranchers and farmers in the affected areas.

15 Additionally, I would suggest that we make significant evaluations of all
16 dams and impoundments in the Columbia Basin to take a hard look at those dams which
17 are only in existence for the local economies when, in fact, they are affecting the ecology.
18 Certainly any structure made by man will eventually come down.

19 And I believe before it's too late, we should take these dams down at this
20 time, rather than wait for some natural disaster to wipe them out.

21 I hate to see the salmon stocks going the way of the do-do, Plains bison,
22 the great ock (phonetic) and other extinct or near extinct animals.

23 And in that the fisheries industry provides almost a near perfect food for a
24 protein hungry world, I would submit that development and perpetuation of this industry is
25 a must.

1 Not only do we lose the genetic diversity of the wild stocks which are
2 affected by these impoundments, we lose part of ourselves every time a species is lost
3 from the earth. In conclusion, therefore, I'm for breaching of the dams, but I would
4 caution that some amends be made for those people and communities that would be
5 affected by such a procedure. My name's Mike Sousa. Thank you very much.

6 MR. PUCKETT: This is Andy Puckett. I speak for myself, my wife Melanie
7 and my son Jack. And I support the breaching of the dams, the four lower Snake River
8 dams in this proposal. Both from a personal standpoint as a fisherman as well as for the
9 health of the Northwest's environment and the survival of these species that are in
10 danger.

11 I just want to make my voice clear in this group of peoples in support of this
12 movement. Thank you.

13 MS. COYNE: My name is Ellen Coyne, and I'm from Missoula, Montana.
14 I'm submitting a comment to do alternative four, breaching of the dams on the lower
15 Snake River. I believe that we need to breach the dams in order to maintain the viable
16 salmon populations. Salmon are a part of our history, and they're really important to the
17 thriving ecosystem that's already put so much at risk.

18 Salmon are also important to adhere to our agreement with the Native
19 Americans. They need access to that salmon. It's part of their spirituality, their culture,
20 their livelihood. Salmon can also provide an industry for us as far as tourism and fishing,
21 and the river with rapids could provide recreational opportunity.

22 I can empathize with the people who live off of the barges and the
23 reservoirs because I know many families who live in that area, and I've lived over there
24 myself. But I think that our concerns are really temporary and they can be remedied.
25 Displaced workers can be trained to work in other jobs.

1 We need to diversify the community anyway, because the -- well, the timber
2 industry over in Lewiston is diminishing as it is, and the levels of dioxin in the water over
3 there are causing a lot of cancer. So maybe it's best that they diversify their community
4 anyway. I think that we're using a lot of federal money, a lot of taxpayers' money on
5 supporting the barging operations and on transporting the smolts to the ocean each year
6 and then back up the river. Maybe we could be using this money to support the workers
7 who'll be displaced and to support the farmers in their transition to a different kind of
8 transportation and a different routine. I guess that's all I have to say. I support the
9 breaching of the dams.

10 MR. GRAY: My name is Gordon Gray. I'm an anesthesiologist in Missoula,
11 Montana. I live at 2106 Hilda Avenue in the University district. I'm making comments on
12 the removal of the Snake River dams. Most of my thoughts are that any actions that we
13 undertake should be sustainable in nature. And even though my house is made of wood
14 and I realize that there are, you know, importantances in extraction industries and
15 industries involving our environmental resources, I think all of these actions must be
16 tempered with the knowledge that whatever changes they impose have to be sustainable.
17 They cannot result in some kind of long and far-reaching benefit that ultimately destroys
18 the resource.

19 That's the problem with the Snake River dams. You know, they have
20 threatened to cause extinction of anadromous fish runs in the Snake River and its
21 tributaries. And obviously this is not a sustainable type of event. You know, this is
22 forever.

23 And we as citizens really should not have the right to impose extinction on a
24 species, and certainly we should not be making this decision for our children and
25 grandchildren. You know, this is a far-reaching affect that cannot be taken back. And

1 therefore, in all conscience, we must remove the dams from the lower Snake River. The
2 science has shown that that is the case, that these must come down for the runs of fish to
3 ever be restored. It's been argued that even if the dams do come down, these runs may
4 not survive or may not thrive. However, that's conjecture.

5 And we know that they will not if the dams stay there. The only chance they
6 have is for them to come down. We must get back to doing things in a sustainable way
7 and this definitely flies in the face of that. And therefore, I'm in favor of removal of the
8 dams on the lower Snake. And I'm sure my children would be, too, if they were old
9 enough to verbalize those comments. But I hope to take them steelhead fishing some
10 day on the tributaries around Montana, and do not wish to deprive them of that
11 opportunity that I've enjoyed. Thank you.

12 MR. HAYNES: My name is Jim Haynes. I'm from Hamilton, Montana. I'm
13 here to comment on the All-H paper and the Corps DEIS. My family is from Idaho, and at
14 least my parents were, and I'm from Montana now with my family. I've grown up around
15 the Salmon River area, and am distressed by the loss of the fishery there. So on behalf
16 of my family, those that are still with me and those that are departed, I know I speak for
17 them in one voice in saying it is time to breach the dams and restore this fish habitat.

18 And I would say to the members who are going to make the
19 recommendation, I appreciate your time in taking in all these comments from people, and
20 certainly your dedication to the process, but I urge you to step forth, make a courageous
21 decision, make a decision that's in the best interest of the fishery. And in the long-term, I
22 think it will be in the best interest of the Northwest. So please make a recommendation
23 for alternative four in breaching these four dams. Thank you.

24 MS. RAMSTAD: My name is Kristina Ramstad. Did you need any other
25 information?

1 THE MODERATOR: No, I'll take that.

2 MS. RAMSTAD: Oh, okay. My name is Kristina Ramstad. I am a fisheries
3 biologist. I'm speaking solely based on my own experience here and for myself. I've
4 been listening to a lot of the comments made from the general public here at the meeting,
5 and I hadn't planned on speaking, but I find myself compelled to now.

6 My experience in fisheries has been with working with salmon throughout
7 Oregon, Washington, Alaska and somewhat in Montana as well. And I would just urge
8 you to remember that there is some science that you should consider in terms of
9 population differentiation of salmonids.

10 A salmon is not a salmon is a salmon. Just because we still find them in the
11 market or on our dinner plate doesn't mean that they are readily accessible and each are
12 equal to the other.

13 Salmon have an amazing ability to adapt locally to their habitats, and this
14 has been documented throughout their range. A salmon from the Snake River is going to
15 be different from a salmon from the Skinar (phonetic), the Frasier or any one in Bristol
16 Bay.

17 And it's important for the overall resilience of the species that we maintain
18 as many of these small populations and these locally adapted populations as possible.

19 There's a lot of good evidence to show that there's significant genetic
20 differentiation between these populations, and that this variation is increased by
21 subdivision of populations, which salmon happen to be champions of. So it's important to
22 preserve as many small populations as we can.

23 We do still have them to eat, that is true, but that is usually due to either
24 farming of salmon, which has its own environmental impacts and impacts on native
25 salmonids or hatchery-produced salmon which also has its own hazards or they're from

1 Alaska. And yes, we have a lot of fish in Alaska, but Washington's rivers used to look like
2 Alaska, and I believe we could have that again one day.

3 Dams may not be the only evil in all of this. They may not be the only
4 reason why salmon are declining. But we certainly know they're contributing, and I think
5 we need to ask ourselves why, if we know that that's the case, we are unwilling to take
6 the steps to remove them.

7 I think we need to take a close look at our motives and just have the will to
8 do what we know is right. We will not go extinct with the loss of five percent of the power
9 generated by dams in the lower Columbia, but the salmon of the Snake River very well
10 might. And beyond their usefulness to us in terms of fisheries and how much money we
11 can make off them via tourism and that sort of thing, they deserve a life of their own.
12 They have reasons – well, maybe not greater reasons – but they have just as much right
13 to exist here as we do.

14 And if there's something we're doing that we can stop doing that will greatly
15 benefit them and have a very low impact for us, we are bound to do that, I believe. And
16 so I urge you to breach the dams on the -- the four dams on the lower Snake River.
17 Thank you very much.

18 MR. JONES: My name's Dave Jones. I'm from Hamilton, Montana. I'm
19 commenting on the EIS. I'm a fishing guide and steelhead angler, and I stand in favor of
20 breaching the four lower Snake River dams. We try to teach our children that it's all right
21 to try something and fail, that that is how we learn, but in reality, we adults find admitting
22 we were wrong an extremely difficult thing to do.

23 Building the four lower Snake dams was wrong in the first place. By naïvely
24 thinking we could have the dams and anadromous fish, we were wrong. As judged by
25 the decline in our Snake River stocks, we must now admit we were wrong in thinking we

1 could recover these fish with technological fixes. As has been the case in recovering
2 every other species threatened with extinction by man's activities, the science tells us to
3 try to return to as natural a system as possible. As a taxpayer, I protest the spending of
4 anymore of my dollars on these failed experiments to mitigate the losses so obviously
5 caused by these dams. We need to find the courage to admit our efforts have failed. It's
6 no crime to admit we have been wrong. It would be criminal to stubbornly refuse to
7 accept the fact until the last salmon is gone. Thank you.

8 (End of taped proceedings.)

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