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# Collaborating for salmon



By **Galen Barnett, The Oregonian**

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As policymakers grapple with climate change proposals, one aspect is clear to citizens in the Northwest: We are blessed with the largest clean and renewable power system in the country. The Columbia and Snake River dams bring enormous economic and environmental benefit to our region and the nation. And the dams do this while serving the needs of salmon, navigation, flood control, power, irrigation and recreation.

In this light, it's frustrating to see those outside our region preaching the destruction of these dams in the name of salmon.

The timing of these attacks is transparent -- the Obama administration currently is reviewing the plan for operating the federal hydro system, and review of that plan is pending in U.S. District Court. A claim among the dam-breaching proponents is that there has not been adequate collaboration on the plan. But the only ones making that claim are the few who did not get their way on extreme measures they proposed.

Meanwhile, federal agencies have worked for years with the Northwest states and tribes to create the most thorough and comprehensive approach to species recovery ever seen. This so-called "biological opinion" under the Endangered Species Act is based on the best available science, and the effort over the past decade has helped push the best science to even higher levels of understanding of the needs of these important fish.

Throughout both the Clinton and Bush administrations, what the best independent scientists found was that breaching dams was not necessary in order to enhance salmon runs. Rather, they proposed a reasoned approach incorporating measures for hydro passage, harvest impacts, hatchery practices and habitat improvement. Because salmon runs are impacted by all these areas, this approach just makes sense.

Another inconvenient fact for the dam-breaching proponents is that fish passage through the hydro system has improved greatly, and continues to improve all the time with new information and technology. Salmon returning to the Columbia River have increased from less than 500,000 fish passing Bonneville Dam in 1938 to well over 1 million fish each year. With respect to the runs that have been of particular focus lately, Snake River sockeye have seen their highest returns in decades, and Snake River fall Chinook returns are meeting recovery goals and are orders of magnitude higher than during the 1990s when much of this effort got underway.

Residents living in cities and towns served with clean, renewable hydroelectric power generated in the Columbia and Snake Rivers have paid for this success. Through power rates paid to consumer-owned utilities served by Bonneville Power Administration, these electricity consumers have funded an unprecedented effort that should and must continue. The pieces are in place for further success if this extraordinary regional collaboration for salmon is allowed to move forward.

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