

## Comments for the Idaho Governor's Salmon Workgroup

November 20, 2020

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I strongly believe it is important to protect all of Idaho's rivers for fisheries, domestic use and recreation. This will include removing dams and replacing lost electricity with solar and wind. All wildlife and fisheries (biodiversity) is vital to the health of Earth and her people. Thank you for this opportunity to comment.

Sincerely: L. Jo Ellis. Challis, Idaho.

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Dear Governor Little Salmon Workgroup,

I am writing to you regarding “breaching the lower four dams on the Snake” for the sake of the salmon. But that over simplifies the issue. I prefer breaching the lower four dams for OUR sake. The question is when do we breach the dams? And finally, if not NOW, why not NOW?

How are things going to change over the next 10 years?

- 1) Barging on the Snake will gradually diminish as the trend suggests now
- 2) Farmers will delay the cost associated with refitting their irrigation access – which is inevitable
- 3) The salmon on the Snake will be extinct
- 4) The sportsman economy around salmon and steelhead runs will be gone at a cost of \$544,000,000 per year according to Idaho Rivers United - 2005
- 5) Electric Power production will thrive with alternative energy ramping up and the largest dams on the Columbia continuing to pump out 96% of the region's needs
- 6) Billions of dollars will be spent on “other” salmon saving programs to no avail (as history has proven)
- 7) Port of Lewiston continues milking taxpayers for subsidies

Please don't join the “head in the sand” mentality that has plagued so many industries unwilling to make hard decisions for the better return later. Surely there are creative ways to appease the farmers by offering cost mitigating ways to help them adjust their water extraction. Lewiston will need to “update” their economic plans to reflect the changing landscape of electricity output and the grain shipping economy.

I and a huge population of recreationists, Idahoans, Native Americans, will stand and applaud your courageous efforts for the ages.

Laura Shealy

Boise Resident

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I can't believe that we are procrastinating on this issue. The time is so short. We need to remove those Snake River dams, or the salmon will be lost. Not only the salmon, but the Orcas and the seals that depend on them for food. The whole system will be lost. Take responsibility and get this done, now.

Sue Peterson

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To whom it may concern:

Which should be all of us. This travesty of make believe salmon recovery in the Northwest has gone on too long. It is well past time we pull our heads out of the sand and fix the problem. There is a solution. The fish did fine before we meddled in their habitat. It can go back to the way it was. Free flowing rivers. The Snake river Dams are the problem for these fish. To think that the dams are an asset to the region is faulty thinking. They are biologically a disaster, and economically a drain. The band-aid fixes have failed and it is overdue that we admit it and get to work. Whoever takes salmon recovery to fruition will be considered a hero. Those of us who refused to take action or speak up are worse than our current Republican Senators. To let these anadromous fish go extinct on our watch is unthinkable. Mitigation for irrigation and power production would be cheaper than the current collection, barging, trucking, constant pit tagging, studying, spill, and hatchery programs. The money that has been spent on salmon recovery in the last four plus decades, with no results, has been one of the worst boondoggle mistakes we could ever conjure up. Do what needs to be done, now! Put the Army Corps to work on dam removal. They need a project. It creates jobs, and would save the fish.

I operate a steelhead lodge and guide service on the upper Salmon River. It employs a bunch of guides, and employees, but only when there are fish. People come from all over the U.S. to catch one of the longest running steelhead in the world in the Sawtooth Valley. Yes, that income is important for our survival too, but leaving our children the legacy of a river named the Salmon with no salmon is something none of us can be proud of.

Sincerely,

Scott Schnebly

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It seems that while the group's aim is to restore the active, healthy population of native salmon species, I'm wondering if the group has agreed on the actual facts that affect this objective. For example, the quantitative trend of returning fish relative to historical numbers. The rate of change. The numbers of returning fish required to reestablish the fishery. The conditions which decimate the number of smelt returning to the ocean. The conditions which decimate the number of mature fish returning to the spawning grounds. If these considerations have agreed-upon answers, then the changes required to achieve successful recovery should become apparent. It appears to this layman that higher river flows are required to bring smelt from hatching grounds to the ocean quickly enough that they can arrive in large enough numbers and healthy enough to survive. It also appears that changes must be made to the obstacles faced by returning fish. Fish ladders don't seem to be sufficient. Dams are the obstacles. Can dams be modified to enable fish to return to their spawning grounds or is the only option to remove some or all of these fish obstacles? If dams are removed, what economic or other issues need to be addressed and are we willing to make the necessary adjustments in order to achieve the recovery of this critical native species? Let's get the facts right and the answers will become evident.

Best regards,  
Richard English  
Hailey, ID  
831-539-3299

Comments to the Governor's Salmon Workgroup will be accepted in-person or by email submitted to [species@osc.idaho.gov](mailto:species@osc.idaho.gov)

Date: November 12, 2020

Name: Nancy Holcomb

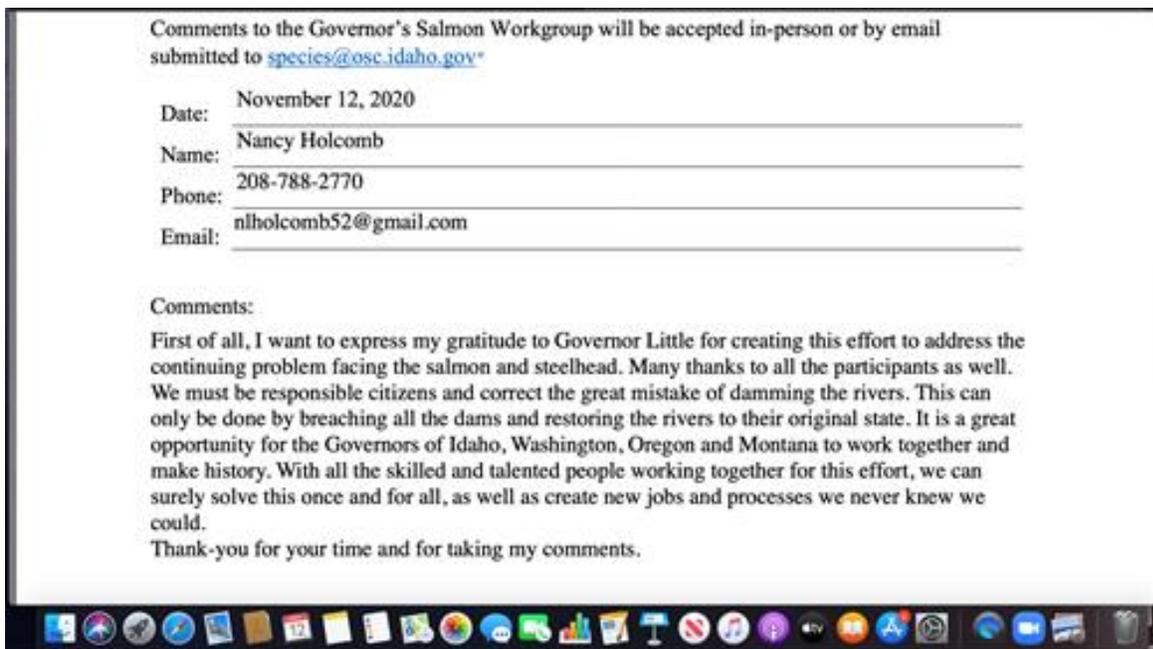
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Comments:

First of all, I want to express my gratitude to Governor Little for creating this effort to address the continuing problem facing the salmon and steelhead. Many thanks to all the participants as well. We must be responsible citizens and correct the great mistake of damming the rivers. This can only be done by breaching all the dams and restoring the rivers to their original state. It is a great opportunity for the Governors of Idaho, Washington, Oregon and Montana to work together and make history. With all the skilled and talented people working together for this effort, we can surely solve this once and for all, as well as create new jobs and processes we never knew we could.

Thank-you for your time and for taking my comments.



Public Comments of Jim DeWitt  
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I do not envy you your task. I hope that everything what I'm going to tell you is merely a reminder.

You will play an important role in determining whether entire species of animals survive or become extinct. Whether salmon and steelhead will recover to anything like their former numbers or vanish forever from Idaho waters.

And not just one species. For better or worse, salmon and steelhead are keystone species, species on which other species in an ecosystem largely depend, such that if it were removed the ecosystem would change drastically.

For example, salmon, in their original numbers, transported tons of ocean nutrients to Idaho, providing critical enrichment to the river valleys of the mountain west. That nutrient transport is diminished, almost gone.

The impact of the loss of salmon goes far beyond the riverine ecologies of Idaho. The marine environment is changed as well. For example, orcas are in sharp decline in the eastern Pacific Ocean because salmon were a key part of their food.

You are charged with deciding the future of species, the future of complex ecologies that we only partially understand. In such a circumstance, a mistake will be devastating. If you get it wrong, not only will ancient species vanish. The consequences of their absence will alter Idaho and even the Pacific Ocean.

As you balance the short term economic needs of people living and working in the Columbia River basin against the continued survival of entire species, please consider as well the impact of a world without Columbia Basin salmon and steelhead. You cannot, in good conscience, claim that preservation efforts so far have worked. You cannot, in good conscience, claim further tinkering with increased dam spill or more hatcheries are likely to save Idaho's salmon and steelhead.

If you get it wrong, even if you merely delay acting, you risk extirpating keystone species. You risk altering in unknown, unforeseeable ways entire ecosystems. Set aside the moral objections to humans killing of entire species. You risk a cascade of changes.

The prudent choice is the politically unpopular one: take out the dams. Will you be prudent? Will you bear in mind the consequences of getting it wrong?

I do not envy you your task.

Thank you.

The following is my public comment for the Governor's Salmon Work Group:

As we know by now, the only action to which will yield results and save the salmon, and not continue to waste taxpayer dollars on halfhearted conservation measures is removal of the four federal dams on the lower Snake.

The science is simple, the water behind these dams is too warm for the salmon to survive. In the era these dams were built, we didn't have renewable energy like solar and wind. Now we do. These dams are aging. Modernizing them is inevitable, and extremely costly. I believe we can be much more creative about replacing the dam's functions with methods which don't kill this keystone species. We need to quit delaying and start that planning for their replacement now. When we see the salmon go, we will see so many species and ecosystem functions that depend on the salmon vanish, until I fear we will have a dead river.

As a kid in school, I remember learning about the tremendous migration of the salmon, who through an instinctual force known only to them are able to return with stunning accuracy to their natal spawning grounds. To a child, the concept of home as a place of safety and security resonates strongly. As we watched these red and silver fish swimming upstream to reach home, struggling past numerous obstacles and dangers, we suddenly felt so related to a species that had at first seemed so different from us.

Idaho is our home. And a home is so much more than an arbitrary landmass within state boundaries. A home is a place that provides, and abundantly. Healthy rivers provide for Idaho, sustaining everything from rural economies, to the pristine natural ecosystems we take pride in. Wild salmon are key to a healthy Snake River.

Breach the dams now to save the salmon from extinction.

Julie Sheen

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Dear Salmon Workgroup members,

I hope everyone had a great weekend. After listening to valuable input from the public on the importance of dam breaching for salmon recovery, there is a new opportunity for discussion. The preliminary report for the dam breach alternative is entitled "[Lower Snake River Juvenile Salmon Migration Feasibility Report/Environmental Impact Statement](#)" published in 2002 by the USACE Walla Walla District.

To begin discussion about the breach alternative is to examine the reasons for its development in this report, which established its importance for contingency management if listed stocks continued to decline.

A pdf version is attached to this email for your convience.

Thank you for your time and efforts to recover endangered species,

Nina Sarmiento

Outreach – Dam Sense

[Info@damsense.org](mailto:Info@damsense.org)

Hello!

My name is Owen Begley-Collier, I made a public comment at the last meeting and thought it would be good to show you the document supporting my claim of a 15 cent on the dollar benefit-cost ratio for the Snake River dams. I hope you read it and find it useful for upcoming discussions.

Thanks!

Owen Begley-Collier

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My name is Claire Siderman, and I guide river trips on the Middle Fork of the Salmon River. I am writing to express my concern about the recovery of Salmon and Steelhead species in Idaho. In late September of last year, on my last commercial trip of the season, I pulled into an eddy and spotted a dead chinook salmon near the bank. It was a moment of awe, realizing how far this wild salmon traveled to spawn in the cold, clear water of the Middle Fork. I felt immense respect for this fish, knowing it was one of a small number of wild salmon that overcame the many obstacles to return to its home waters. In the current world of a warming and shifting climate, obstructed river channels, industry pressures, and numerous human-related stresses, at risk fisheries continue to confront incredible impediments to their survival. How do we expect to bring these species back to sustained abundant levels without bold actions which support their recovery? Prior to guiding, I spent a summer living in Alaska. What I saw and learned there is that salmon unite people. Salmon are at the center of industry, culture, sustenance and lifestyle of many different types. Humans rely on salmon, and in this reciprocal relationship, salmon now rely on us to provide the necessary conditions for their survival. Their survival now comes with a sense of urgency. If we hope to support this species for the many people who rely on them, the indigenous people of Idaho and the Northwest US who have lived in relation with these species for thousands of years, then we need to be honest about the cost of the dams on the lower Snake River and other impediments to salmon and steelhead species. The actions we take now will reflect the conversations we will have about salmon and steelhead species abundance in the next 20, 30, and 100 years. Thank you for making the necessary choices to protect these species, and listening to the voices of the concerned.

Clair Siderman

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Greetings members of the workgroup and thank you for the opportunity to give public comment this afternoon.

As you may recall, my name is Shiva Rajbhandari and I am a Sophomore at Boise High.

Today I'm going to read you all a riddle:

*This thing all things devours;  
Birds, beasts, trees, and flowers;  
Gnaws iron, bites steel;  
Grinds hard stones to meal;  
Slays kings, ruins town,  
And beats the mountain down.*

Does anyone know the answer to this riddle?

Time.

I'm sure you're all asking, what does the Hobbit have to do with the 4 Lower Snake River Dams?

Here's your answer. If the entire history of the planet happened in 1 day, salmon come along about 6 million years ago, or at 11:58 pm on our clock. Now the 4 lower snake river dams aren't built until the mid-twentieth century: 11:59 pm 59 seconds and 999 milliseconds. I'm sure no one can relate, but if we were one of those kids who sings 8teen by Khalid at midnight on our eighteenth birthday, the intro would already be playing. Now, by all estimates, wild salmon and steelhead will go extinct by 2050 at the latest. We have  $6.6 \times 10^{-9}$  seconds to save our fish. It's almost like this initiative to save these keystone species we've known were damned to extinction since the nineties - VERY last minute. Now here is the important part. Dams do not last forever. We all know that despite everyone's best efforts, solar and wind power is already cheaper than all other means of electricity generation. These dams are going to be removed during my lifetime. They are simply too expensive to compete. This workgroup gets hyped up a lot for the ability to decide so much: the fate of the pointless Lewiston port, the amount of power oversupply the Pacific Northwest will have next year, Idaho's energy future, et cetera. But really, all you guys determine is whether our beloved fish will live or die. Everything else will fall into place eventually regardless of the proposals you submit to Governor Little next month.

So I ask you once again: what do you all want to be known for? Reviving what could be a 500 million dollar economy, preserving Idaho's god-given inheritance for generations to come. Or damaging our fish to extinction in a pointless decision that was just overturned by time a few decades later.

Thank you.

Shiva Rajbhandari

**Samuel Ziegler** November 12th, 2020  
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To Whom It May Concern,

Chinook Salmon spawned on the Salmon River Main fork in numbers ranging 45,000 to 50,000 in the 1950s, while today only around 1,500 Chinook make it back to the Salmon river to spawn (Robbins, 2019). There are a number of factors leading to the decline of Salmon populations in Idaho including dams on the lower Snake River in Washington State, river water temperature, and ocean conditions, but I would like to focus on the proposed Stibnite Gold Mining Project (Staff, 2020).

Located in the headwaters of the South Fork of the Salmon River, the Stibnite Gold Mining Project would result in a 20% loss of overall Chinook Salmon habitat (Nez Perce Tribe, 2020). Not only will this mining project remove Chinook habitat, it is against the Nez Perce Treaty of 1855, establishing the right of the Nez Perce to fish and travel on all traditional lands. The Nez Perce Tribe spends \$2.5 million annually on “hatchery supplementation, fishery research, and watershed restoration near, and downstream of, Midas Gold’s proposed mine” (Scott 2018). Mining companies in the past have left their finished mining sites without following through with environmental cleanup promises, leaving it to the responsibility of the Nez Perce and local environmental agencies. Previous mining projects have left behind a wake of destruction, for example the Thompson Creek mine resulted in 413 acres of toxic mine tailings, 3 toxic tailing ponds, 430 acres of waste rock storage (Nez Perce Tribe 2020). The Midas Gold company is Canadian with New York stakeholders who have no ties to the Salmon River basin; streams will be relocated, and 2 new toxic lakes will be dammed into the salmon river watershed (Nez Perce Tribe 2020). Although the site of the proposed mine is on the same place as the old mine, the footprint will be several times larger (USFS 2016).

Economic loss will also be a result of the mine. Whitewater enthusiasts and other river visitors contribute to a \$13.5 million annually to the Salmon River Main local communities, and Idaho’s recreation economy which provides \$2.3 billion in wages and 78,000 recreation jobs are directly related to the Salmon River Watershed (Nez Perce Tribe 2020). The jobs that could be created by the Stibnite Mine are no justification for the damage to the Chinook habitat on the Salmon river. It is imperative to the success of Chinook Salmon populations that the State of Idaho does everything it can to block the Stibnite Gold Mining Project.

Regards,  
Sam Ziegler

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