



The Enterprise

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Commentary on dam misstates the issues

In his letter last week about Northwestern Dam (or 'Condit' as it's owner, PacifiCorp, calls it) William Manly misstates the issues, for which Samuel Clemens, the journalist, would not forgive him. But then, Twain himself said: "Get your facts first, and then you can distort them as much as you please."

Mr. Manly alleges that somewhere, a dam removal advocate believes: "there was a huge run of salmon, clear to Trout Lake." It is generally recognized that steelhead, let alone salmon, couldn't get past 27 foot high Big Brother Falls (just below the 'green truss bridge' north of BZ). Even a steelhead can only jump 12 to 14 feet.

Mr. Manly says that before Bonneville Dam, "most of the salmon spawned between the mouth of the river where it enters the Columbia and the point where Northwestern Dam is now." Actually, fall chinook prefer the main-stem, like below the dam and will continue to do so. Steelhead and spring chinook and coho salmon would spawn in cooler water above the dam where another 33 miles of habitat is accessible to steelhead and 14 miles to salmon.

It's worth noting that the dam has degraded the fall chinook habitat – perhaps since Mr. Manly was a teenager. Deprived of gravel from upriver, the mile between the dam and the powerhouse (the bypass) is deficient in spawning gravel for the fall chinook. Moreover, the very low flow along the pipeline further reduces the bypass' value for spawning. PacifiCorp maintains a minimum flow of 15 cubic feet per second (cfs), per their 1993 Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) license. More recently, FERC has recommended a minimum flow of 150 cfs during July and August and 200 cfs the rest of the year. Unfortunately, more water in the riverbed along the pipeline means less water in the pipe and less power generated.

Apparently referring to recent letters by Lance Beckman and Carl Dugger, Mr. Manly says the comments of a fish biologist should be "taken with a grain of salt". Actually, comments from these retired USGS and Washington Fish and Wildlife scientists and managers should be taken very seriously. They reflect the best information of the resource management community and invaluable insight into what FERC and NOAA Fisheries will likely require.

The law (the Federal Power Act and Endangered Species Act) requires fish passage and NOAA Fisheries and FERC enforce the law in the interest of current and future Americans, recognizing that conservation of wild species is for many, an economic, quality of life and/or moral necessity.

The bottom line remains: PacifiCorp has concluded that, under the terms of the law, the dam is not cost-effective.

(Interested readers should visit www.whitesalmonriver.org where many pertinent documents may be viewed and downloaded.)

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