

**In Response -**  
*St. Petersburg, Florida Times,*  
*October 11, 2002:*

**The complicated salmon struggle -**

-- I was not too surprised to discover that the St. Petersburg Times is holding forth on the art and science of salmon recovery in the Pacific Northwest. Federal tax dollars built the Federal Columbia River Power System, and any citizen in the nation has a legitimate interest in its environmental impact. The challenge of salmon recovery, however, is far more complex than the solution -- dam removal -- offered in your Sept. 28 editorial (Helping salmon survive).

Any strategy to prevent salmon extinction must account not only for the impact of the hydropower system but also the impact of hatcheries, harvest and habitat. It is far from clear that "the only solution" to avert salmon extinction is to breach the dams.

The Army Corps of Engineers has completed a comprehensive analysis of all the factors associated with dam removal. The analysis was developed in partnership with other federal, state and tribal representatives and public interest groups, and was independently peer-reviewed. The corps determined that breaching the four Lower Snake River dams would cost \$267-million annually in forfeited economic benefits. In lieu of dam removal, we elected to pursue an aggressive series of operational and structural migration enhancements at an annual cost of \$13-million.

For adult fish returning from the ocean to natal spawning grounds, fish ladders at the dams have always been very effective. Information on adult passage for 2001 indicates survival past each dam was about 99 percent for adults. Research shows that survival of Snake River spring Chinook juveniles migrating in-river through the hydrosystem is as high or higher in recent years than prior to construction of the Snake River dams.

Survival of barged fish is about 98 percent to the point of release below Bonneville Dam. Incidentally, the annual cost to run the juvenile fish barging program is about \$3-million. The \$506-million you cited for salmon recovery represents the entire regional federal budget for dam improvements, habitat restoration, and hatchery and harvest management activities. Part of the funds comes from hydropower revenue generated by the Bonneville Power Administration.

While the dams are a factor in the decline of the salmon runs, problems were apparent even before the dams. Modern development brought overfishing and a proliferation of hatcheries, followed by industry, roads, logging, mining, cattle ranching, farming, the dams and other stresses to the natural systems, all of which have played a part in salmon

declines. Ocean conditions are a factor as well. Record returns of adult Chinook salmon over the past two years are attributed not only to regional efforts for restoration, but to greatly improved ocean productivity.

The people of the Northwest understand these issues, and there is a broad base of support throughout the region to seek salmon recovery while maintaining the multiple benefits of the Federal Columbia River Power System. The real relevance of this issue for the people of Florida, however, is not so much salmon as it is the choice between re-engineering and de-engineering. Can we re-engineer our waterways' infrastructure to retain their economic benefits while addressing the needs of the environment, or must we de-engineer our waterways, removing dams, levees and other man-made structures to return our rivers to a state of nature?

Floridians, who apply a significant amount of engineering to harness their own waterways in a fragile ecosystem, face the same choices as the people of the Northwest. All of us must seek the best understanding of the available facts as we make these difficult choices.

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**THE EDITORIAL:  
St. Petersburg Times,  
September 28, 2002: Helping salmon survive -**

### **Helping salmon survive**

Salmon on the lower Snake River in Washington state are nearing extinction, and the only solution is to breach four hydroelectric dams. Floridians might wonder what this has to do with them, but two local members of Congress, Rep. C.W. Bill Young, R-Largo, and Rep. Jim Davis, D-Tampa, could play key roles in passing an important piece of legislation that would let a salmon rescue plan go forward.

It would be a national shame to lose a species as magnificent and valuable as the salmon. It could also be expensive. While the dams provide cheap electricity and ample water for agricultural irrigation, they threaten significant fishing and tourism industries in the region. In fact, two of the groups leading the fight to save the salmon are recreational and commercial fishermen. Yet there is an even greater financial threat hanging on the outcome.

The U.S. government has treaties with Native Americans along the Columbia River (the Snake River is a tributary) that guarantee tribal rights to harvest salmon in established quantities. Federal action (or inaction) that led to salmon extinction could violate the

treaties and open the government, and all taxpayers, to claims in the billions of dollars.

Then there is the cost of trying to help the salmon survive the dams. The problem is this: Salmon traversing the Columbia and Snake rivers must get past eight dams, four on each river. Each dam claims a portion of the fish population so that few make it past the final four dams on the Snake River. Twelve species of salmon are listed as endangered or threatened, and the Snake River population has plunged by nearly 90 percent.

The solution devised by the U.S. Army **Corps of Engineers** is an exercise in futility. It scoops up young salmon and hauls them past the dams by truck or barge, depositing them on the lower Columbia. The process is hugely expensive. Next year's proposed budget would spend \$506-million on salmon restoration, compared with only \$245-million for Everglades restoration. Yet the effort is a failure. Shipping causes the young salmon to suffer shock and disorientation so that survival rates fall far short of what is needed to avoid extinction.

A real fix is at hand. RAND, an independent research firm, released a report recently that shows the generating power lost from breaching the dams could be replaced with new wind and solar sources. However, the **Corps of Engineers** claims it does not have the authority to breach the dams, which requires removing only a portion of the dam near the shore.

That is where Reps. Young and Davis come in. According to Save Our Wild Salmon, a coalition of business and environmental groups, their support could be crucial to getting the Salmon Planning Act heard. Young is chairman of the Appropriations Committee, and Davis is a leader of the New Democrat Coalition, which has 74 members. The act would order the government to complete a dam removal study and give the Corps authority to carry out the plan. It should appeal to both representatives' interest in avoiding waste in government spending and protecting our vanishing environment.