

## DEDICATED PEOPLE WHO CARE

ABOUT FARM FAMILIES  
ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENT  
ABOUT THE COMMUNITIES WE SERVE

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*[April 7, 2021]*

The Honorable Mike Simpson

Member of Congress

State of Idaho, Second District

Representative Simpson:

On behalf of 8,000 farm families who raise wheat from Idaho Falls to Bonners Ferry, across eastern Washington and northeastern Oregon and beyond, we thank you for participating in a number of virtual meetings organized by many agricultural organizations. We appreciate you taking the time to discuss your concept of removing the lower Snake River dams and the substantial monies you indicated would be necessary to limit the impact it would have. You encouraged participants to share ideas and information with you. We would like to take the opportunity to clear up the following misconceptions first:

- It is incorrect to state that downriver barge shipments have declined. The millions of tons of grain barged downriver have remained stable, year after year. Other shipments have increased dramatically—upriver shipments of fertilizer, starting at zero several years ago, now are necessary to provide growers on the Camas Prairie, the Palouse and beyond the timely deliveries trains and trucks cannot—with more than a million acres of land to be fertilized and seeded in short order to achieve best yields at harvest time.
- It is not accurate to state that barging can be replaced with cheaper alternatives. Trucks and trains produce more greenhouse gases in transport up and down the river, are more expensive, and far less able to deliver or ship on time. In 2017 the Lewis-Clark Grain Terminal in Lewiston shipped more than 20.6 million bushels of wheat and barley to international markets. Without an economic and timely way to move more wheat to foreign buyers, these bushels would instead glut the domestic market and harm the export trade so critical to the Northwest economy.
- Your conclusion that, “Washington grain farmers can take that water [used to help move salmon downriver] to irrigate their grain and compete against our [Idaho] farmers” is incorrect. Grain raised in the Palouse, on the Camas Prairie, and beyond, depend upon timely rains. In the irrigated lowlands of the Columbia Basin, wheat is raised sparingly as a rotational crop. The ‘surge’ of water to hurry along smolt has nothing to do with irrigating the crops that are grown there. Those dam operators in your district who participate in the voluntary flow augmentation program are compensated by the Bureau of Reclamation—helping offset operations and maintenance costs,

thereby lowering the cost of water to Idaho's farmers.

- Wheat growers in our Northwest states don't spend much time competing with each other, as you feared. Our biggest challenges and opportunities are overseas, around the Pacific Rim and elsewhere and our competitors are Australia, Canada and other countries. We've worked for generations as wheat producers to seek new trade opportunities overseas for the classes of grain we raise.

We are appreciative that, as you stated, you are looking for some solutions and better ideas. Unfortunately, we cannot agree that removing 'run of the river' dams with 95%+ survival rates for out-migrating salmon is a good idea. A just-released report from NOAA Fisheries raises the alarm that, should warming ocean conditions follow modeling trends, salmon populations along the Pacific coast will be at risk of extinction in forty years. Their focus offers an opportunity to help meet the challenge while addressing the concerns you mentioned in the virtual meeting—that you feel that “all the benefits [of the dams] go to Washington.” We suggest you consider alternatives that would direct substantial federal dollars to Idaho and its' neighbors to help restore salmon habitat, improvements that could be made without sacrificing carbon free hydro power for hundreds of thousands of homes or cutting off barge shipments downriver to the largest export terminus for wheat in the nation, third largest in the world.

Though predictions of warming ocean temperatures are the biggest challenge, “habitat offers hope,” the NOAA Fisheries scientists stated. “Restoring lost and damaged habitat could increase productivity by supporting more juvenile fish as they feed and grow in streams before migrating to the ocean...Throughout salmon watersheds, improving and expanding access to rearing habitat should increase smolt abundance and body condition, resulting in improved population viability.” While all options are worth consideration, the scientists concluded, “management actions that open new quality salmon habitat, improve productivity within the existing habitat, or reduce mortality through direct or indirect efforts in the ocean are desperately needed.”

As growers, we've helped improve downstream habitat by continuing to improve our care for the soil—reducing soil losses during our working careers by nearly 90%. To cite just one example, the Washington Conservation Commission credits voluntary programs over a four-year period in the Palouse River drainage of Washington and Idaho with saving enough topsoil to fill dump trucks lined up from the Capitol Building in Olympia to the Space Needle in Seattle, a sixty mile traffic jam. Yet we are concerned that when it comes to shipping our crops to market or bringing needed nutrients upstream, your proposal heads us in the wrong direction on efficiency and air emissions so much a factor in the dire predictions about climate and warming oceans. Inland barges carry a ton of freight 514 miles per gallon of fuel. On the same gallon of fuel, trains carrying one ton of freight travel 202 miles, trucks 59 miles. Both alternatives to barging create substantially more CO<sub>2</sub> as well.

Instead of spending tens of billions of dollars to transform an efficient transportation system into some sort of makeshift alternative, replacing renewable hydropower with not yet developed storage systems for wind or solar, or forcing those dependent on reliable irrigation water to make do with something less, we can work together constructively and positively. Governor Little of Idaho in 2019 announced his Workgroup on Salmon Recovery, calling upon Idaho stakeholders and tribes to provide consensus driven recommendations to “turn things around.” Participants included a broad array of people who value the river system and its iconic fish—participants included leaders representing tribes, wildlife organizations, hydropower, ports, conservation and nature groups, grain producers, ranchers, outfitters and legislators. The workgroup recently released recommendations built around the four H’s—hydro, habitat, hatchery, and harvest—and ocean conditions and predation as well. The full list of recommendations can be found [here](#).

You’ve asked “if you don’t like my plan, where’s yours?” and we urge you to support and help provide funding for NOAA Fisheries recovery plans that have been created for each of Idaho’s runs. These plans are based on science and were developed with collaboration from our states, sovereign tribes, and many others in 2017. NOAA, the states and tribes have already published plans and we think it is time to get serious as a region in funding the hard work that it will take to make these plans a reality. Here are direct links to the reports from NOAA:

- <https://media.fisheries.noaa.gov/dam-migration/final-snake-river-spring-summer-chinook-salmon-and-snake-river-steelhead-recovery-plan-2017.pdf>
- <https://media.fisheries.noaa.gov/dam-migration/final-snake-river-fall-chinook-salmon-recovery-plan-2017.pdf>
- <https://repository.library.noaa.gov/view/noaa/1600143>

With these plans, and the consensus report by Governor Little’s task force, this could be a great way to partner in a shared commitment to salmon recovery, going forward.

By working together, we can make real and lasting progress improving prospects for salmon without endangering livelihoods and jobs and a Northwest economy so dependent the world class crops we grow to feed a hungry nation and the world. No amount of money—even \$34 billion—can cover the costs of disrupting towns and cities, dismantling a significant share of the renewable power that makes the Northwest a clean-air leader and a transportation network low on hydrocarbons and high on efficiency that enables our region to be leaders in international trade. We’d been through a tough series of years in agriculture even before the pandemic and breaching the lower Snake River dams would put the livelihoods of many a dedicated farm family at risk. As farm families with a deep heritage here, we urge you to take a balanced approach, keeping those dams and their efficient ‘state of the art’ fish passage systems while helping secure funds to implement the recommendations of Governor Little’s Salmon Recovery Workgroup and the blueprint for salmon recovery from NOAA. We appreciate your stated desire to be open to constructive ideas and feedback so we can move forward. On that, we agree. With that in mind, please consider our proposals to keep Pacific Northwest agriculture, families, businesses, and export economy on firm footing while increasing salmon numbers and expanding

salmon habitat in the process. We believe that by working together we can find constructive answers to the challenges we face across this remarkable land.

Sincerely,

[Alex McGregor, Chairman, The McGregor Company]

+ Farm Families of the Inland Northwest