



A REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP

The Dalles Dam - Celilo Falls Primary Documents

William Brophy, Bureau of Indian Affairs Commissioner, sent the following letter to his superiors as a protest to the Columbia River development that was occurring during his tenure.

United States
Department of the Interior
Office of Indian Affairs
Chicago 54, Ill.

Oct. 11, 1946

Memorandum for the Chairman, Interior Coordinating Committee

Since pre-Columbian days the Indians of the Columbia basin have been dependant upon the salmon runs of the Columbia and its tributaries for a very large part of their food supply. During the past 80 years, commercial exploitation of these salmon fisheries produced for the national and international market a pack with wholesale value in excess of 500 million dollars, according to federal and state records. Indians derived a large part of their subsistence from these fisheries. Construction on the Grand Coulee Dam has destroyed the part of the salmon runs spawning above this obstruction. Bonneville Dam has diminished to an as yet undetermined extent those runs spawning of the tributaries of the Columbia River above Bonneville. Stream pollution, obstructions and damage to the spawning grounds below Bonneville have also diminished the total yield. Despite these adverse factors, the annual wholesale value of the total Columbia River pack is now estimated at about 6 to 10 million dollars, indicating a present capitalized value of this natural resource in excess of 200 million dollars. It is estimated that this resource now supplies the equivalent of about 5,000 man years of remunerative employment, including the equivalent of almost 600 man years of Indian employment. Several thousand Indians and many more non-Indians engaged in catching, processing, transporting and handling the annual salmon crop in the river and on the ocean are depending on the Columbia Salmon runs for a large part of their livelihood. In the national economy and food supply, the Columbia salmon is a distinct factor. In order to check, if possible, the decrease of this important natural resource, elaborate fish ladders were installed at Bonneville. Coincident with the threat to the Columbia salmon, the yield of salmon from Alaskan waters, principal world source of this fish food, is diminishing.

The principal surviving Indian fishery is at Celilo Falls. There the annual take of salmon and steel head by Indians for sale and home consumption is about 2,500,000 pounds, with a wholesale value of about 375 thousand dollars. Between Bonneville Dam and Celilo and above Celilo on the Columbia, Deschutes, the Klickitat and other tributaries, the indians take an estimated additional quantity of 900,000 pounds of fish with a value of 135 thousand dollars for their subsistence. Formerly they took large quantities of salmon at Kettle Falls and other sites on the upper Columbia River. Exclusive fishing rights on their reservation were confirmed to the Indians by treaties; access to customary fishing sites off the reservations was assured the Indians by the same treaties.

Construction of the Grand Coulee Dam destroyed the Indian salmon fisheries at kettle Falls and at other sites on the upper Columbia and its tributaries.

Construction of the Bonneville Dam has diminished the salmon runs ascending the Columbia and

Snake rivers to the spawning grounds on the Upper Snake and its tributaries.

Construction of the McNary Dam and the proposed three or four dams on the Lower Snake River will destroy all the salmon runs now passing Celilo Falls, according to competent authority.

Construction of the Dalles Dam will flood Celilo Falls and make impossible any fishing at this most important Indian site.

The completion of the proposed obstructions on the main stem of the Columbia will destroy the Indian fisheries on the Deschutes, the Yakima, the Klickitat and other tributaries.

The principal justification for the construction of the McNary and the Dalles dams is the production of power; for the proposed dams on the Lower Snake River, irrigation and slack water navigation to Lewiston, Idaho, are additional justifications. Lower transportation costs on a relatively small volume of bulk freight so not, in my opinion, justify the destruction of a natural resource as important to the Indians, the regional and the national economy as the Columbia River salmon fisheries.

Production of low cost power perhaps outranks the salmon fisheries on the regional and national scale, but in my judgement the installation of dams which would destroy the fisheries should be postponed until all other sources of low cost power which will not affect the salmon runs have been fully developed.

I join the Fish and Wildlife Service in the recommendation that construction of the Dalles Dam be not authorized, that construction of the McNary Dam be postponed and that the power needs of the region be met by the full development of the Grand Coulee and Rock Island Dam power potentialities to their maximum capacity. I also join in the recommendation that the dam at the Foster Creek site below Grand Coulee be constructed and its power potentialities fully developed before McNary Dam is built, as the salmon run which formerly passed the Foster Creek site on the Columbia River has already been destroyed by the construction of Grand Coulee Dam.

I also join the Fish and Wildlife Service in the recommendation that construction work on the Lower Snake River dams be indefinitely postponed.

The Fish and Wildlife Service is now studying the feasibility and the cost of restoring the diminished Columbia River salmon runs depending upon the spawning grounds at the headwaters of the tributaries reaching the Columbia below Bonneville; that Service is also investigating the possibility of transferring to these lower river spawning grounds some of the runs now spawning on the headwaters of the Snake River and its tributaries. It is also studying the technical problems of anadromous fish conveyance up and down the river over high obstacles. The cost of this investigation and of the various measures necessary to protect and preserve the salmon runs is estimated by the Fish and Wildlife Service at 20 million dollars, with an annual operating cost of approximately a million dollars. It is obvious that the development of power and the supply of additional irrigation water should not be carried out at the expense of an existing most valuable natural resource. I propose that there be included in the construction costs of these projects, if they are built, amounts to compensate the states and the Indians for any losses sustained as a result of the diminution or destruction of the salmon runs. I also recommend that the Department oppose the construction of the Dalles Dam and any dams on the Columbia or Lower Snake Rivers designed primary to make possible slack water navigation.

William A. Brophy, Commissioner

Center for Columbia River History

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