

Bearing Witness

The Last Salmon Ceremony

The law locks up both man and woman
Who steal the goose from off the common
But lets the greater felon loose
Who steals the common from the goose.

End Game For Snake River Salmon

Summary

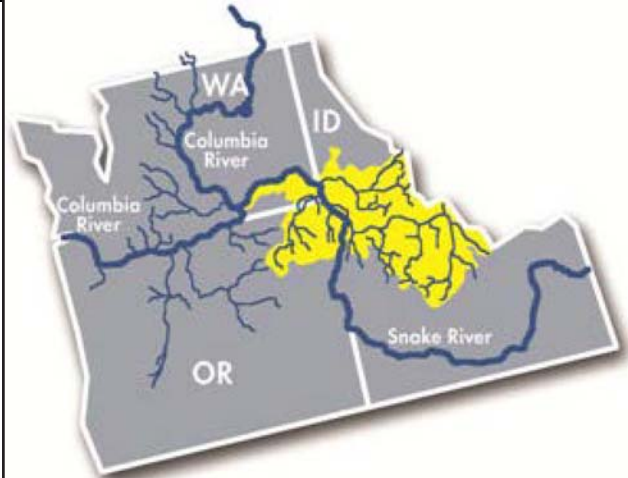
We are eyewitness to an epic ecological crime against humanity, the threatened extinction of salmon produced in the vast pristine habitats of the Snake River Basin. The enormous ecological, economic and social damage extends throughout the many thousand mile-long freshwater and marine migratory range of the fish.

The agent of extinction is Bonneville Power Administration and its Columbia River Pork Alliance, a politically powerful regional clique of compromised bureaucrats, monopolists, crony capitalists, entrenched pork barrel economic interests, and allied politicians who feed off public largess and each other. It includes electric utilities, waterway transportation interests, Big Ag and energy intensive industry.

The means of extinction is four Army Corps of Engineers' pork barrel dams constructed 1960-1975 on the lower Snake River in southeastern Washington. Despite the intent of Congress in authorizing the dams, the Corps negligently failed to make any provision for juvenile salmon from the vast pristine headwaters of the Snake River to migrate to the ocean. Disaster happened.

The Corps spent hundreds of millions of public dollars retrofitting the dams to make them less lethal. It was like trying to paste butterfly wings on pyramids to make them fly. The Corps and Bonneville—which markets the power produced by the dams—eventually decided the young salmon had to be literally strained out of the river, be put in barges and trucks and hauled 400 miles to the lower Columbia River.

Bonneville's Columbia River Pork Alliance has subverted every Snake River salmon protection law, from the 1855 treaty-reserved rights of



Map courtesy Flyfisher magazine/Federation of Fly Fishers.

Snake River salmon and steelhead are unique in the world, migrating thousands of miles along the Pacific coast and nearly 1,000 miles inland to as high as 7,500 feet elevation.

Once numbering in the millions, they spawn and rear in the largest contiguous wilderness and roadless land complex in the coterminous United States. This area includes more than 4.4 million acres in 6 wilderness areas, more than 700 miles in 12 Wild and Scenic Rivers, and nearly 1 million acres within 2 National Recreation Areas. This vast area is the safe deposit box for a genetic heritage millions of years in the making.

Native American Indian tribes, forward through the 1934 Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act; the 1975 Lower Snake River Compensation Plan; salmon protection provisions of laws establishing Wilderness Areas, Wild and Scenic Rivers, National Recreation Areas; federal forest and rangeland management policies; and the sweeping by-god-this-time-you-finally-will-comply-with-the-will-of-the-Nation salmon restoration provisions of the 1980 Northwest Power Act.

Now Bonneville and the Corps, aided and abetted by corrupted factions of the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration, are laboring to subvert the 1973 Endangered Species Act in the federal courts, in the court of public opinion, and in the Congress.

Not A Victimless Crime

The egregious corruption of government and betrayal of the public trust that drove Snake River salmon onto the list of endangered species drove the Northwest region and the Nation into the ditch with disastrous ecological, economic and social consequences of almost unimaginable proportions.

- The adverse ecological damage extends a thousand miles inland and thousands of miles along the Pacific coast. It ranges from depriving endangered bull trout and a multitude of other freshwater organisms of critical marine-derived nutrients, to impoverishing endangered killer whales by denying them an important marine food resource.
- The economic damage is astronomical and counting. Billions of dollars have been lost to local, state, regional, and national economies. Billions more public dollars have been spent on political eyewash salmon enhancement projects for the purpose of diverting attention from the four deadly dams on the lower Snake River. Additional billions in future economic benefits are at risk.
- The U.S. and Canada, states, Native American Indian tribes, local communities, and neighbors have been pitted against each other in internecine conflict over drastically reduced supplies of fish.
- The Northwest is wracked with legal and political turmoil that hemorrhages enormous amounts of human and economic capital, diverts attention from business-like solutions, and stifles entrepreneurial ingenuity that would produce substantial regional and national economic benefits.

- Scientific salmon management throughout the Northwest has been politically corrupted at federal, regional, state and tribal levels.

- The rule of law has been made a mockery. Treaties with Northwest Indian tribes and Canada have in practical effect been abrogated. The intent of laws and social contracts with all people of the Northwest and the Nation has been thwarted.

- Bonneville's Pork Alliance and its political enablers cravenly pit people of the Northwest against each other in zero-sum conflict. Their objective is to divert attention from business-like win-win alternatives to the ecologically, economically and socially destructive pork barrel dams on the lower Snake River. To date they've achieved their "not invented here" objective.

The Public Interest & Rule of Law Be Damned

Bonneville claims the Columbia River Basin and the Federal Columbia River Power System as its fiefdom. The Bonneville-led Pork Alliance for decades has repeatedly demonstrated there is no tactic too low, no damage to the public, region, nation or future generations it will not enthusiastically embrace, no cost too great for others now and in the future to bear in order to protect its iron grip on the public trough.

Reasonable people might think this would be soul-rotting work for public employees paid to act in the public interest. Perhaps in Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood. In the United Pork Barrel States of the Columbia River Basin, the perpetrators of this ecological crime against humanity are *proud* of their work! And it pays well; very well indeed.

The dark history of the current grim situation starkly reveals the fragility of democracy and the rule of law when government loses its public interest moorings, becomes a shill for pork barrel economic interests, and turns scofflaw.

The rule of law is based on the premise that government agencies will comply with the law. When they don't, the judicial default is to tell them to try again. And again. And again. Until they finally get it right, or figure out how to subvert or otherwise make a political end run around the law.

While the Endangered Species Act legal game plays out in the federal courts, Bonneville and the Pork Alliance work feverishly to strengthen their political stranglehold on the region, the Obama Administration and the Congress. With anti-salmon demagogues in charge of important House committees, they think the political stars are in alignment to achieve their long-sought Final Solution to Snake River salmon interfering with their theft of the Snake River Commons.

Expect a congressional end run on the Endangered Species Act similar to the one that recently removed wolves in Idaho and Montana from the List of Endangered Species.

No Accountability

There has been no accountability for the disastrous ecological, economic and social consequences of this longstanding epic betrayal of the public trust. Powerful elected officials provide political cover for Bonneville/Pork Alliance perfidy. A compliant news media increasingly acts more as a bulletin board for the salmon-killing bureaucrats than as a watchdog.

In the darkest times it is a minimum duty of citizenship—a concept unknown to the Pork Alliance, its political enablers and pork barrel beneficiaries—to bear witness. This is the mission of The Last Salmon Ceremony.

U.S. Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis long ago avowed that “sunshine is the best disinfectant” for the failure of government. The *Last Salmon Ceremony blog* will host a series of virtual occasional papers which will apply “sunshine” to this epic failure of

government and betrayal of the public trust by people who lost their moral bearings.

These virtual occasional papers will be launched into cyberspace as perpetually retrievable messages in bottles. The hope is that one day they will figuratively wash up on the doorsteps of the salmon killers' children and grandchildren; perhaps they will provide the accountability then that we are unable to obtain today.

NRIC is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization incorporated in 1976 specifically to address the then-threatened wild salmon and steelhead of the Snake River Basin. Details @ www.nwric.org

NRIC Director Ed Chaney has 40 years professional experience with Columbia/Snake Rivers salmon issues at local, state, tribal, regional and national levels.