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NEWS RELEASE

A Congressman plans to breach dams

Lower Snake River Dams targeted again - increasing carbon with end to navigation and removing clean power

(February 4, 2021, Spokane, WA) A southern Idaho Congressman who has more than a dozen dams within his state without fish passage has floated a plan to breach the four lower Snake River dams, dams that contain some of the world's most effective fish passage.

Idaho Rep. Mike Simpson, 2nd District, is proposing to establish a \$32 billion "Columbia Basin Fund" for salmon recovery and restructuring of the Pacific Northwest. There is a lot of work underway for salmon, and more committed funding for on-the-ground efforts is indeed important, for example, water quality work and better understanding of our oceans. However, a central piece of the proposal is the old familiar cry and extreme measure of removing four Snake River dams, which would eliminate wheat and other products barged from Lewiston downriver to the Tri-Cities. Critical crop inputs and other products moving upriver in barges would end as well. But the loss of wheat farmers' transportation corridor using the most environmentally friendly mode of transportation is only one consequence. The abandonment of the four dams' clean electrical generation would be hard to replace.

Simpson would be spreading around \$32 billion to eliminate the worst impacts of dam breaching and to address other salmon issues. Glen Squires, CEO of the Washington Grain Commission, said that sounds more like making everybody happy with money so they are less concerned with impacts elsewhere.

"First of all, if the Representative is so interested in dams and getting fish back to Idaho, I'd suggest he look at those within his state that were built without fish passage, cutting fish off from pristine habitat. Secondly, while a portion of the \$32 billion may attempt to address a slice of the economic pain that would result from breaching the four dams, it cannot begin to address the economies of businesses and communities dependent upon the Columbia-Snake River System," he said. "Making Simpson's proposal even worse is a self-serving call to place a moratorium on any type of litigation for public and private dams, including those that completely block fish migration."

The four lower Snake River dams have more than 95 percent fish migration survival, and the barge traffic they support eliminates millions of tons of CO2 from the

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atmosphere during a period of time when the U.S., and especially Washington state, is committed to reducing greenhouse gases. The proposal looks more like an increased carbon plan and relies on uncertain investments and technologies.

Michelle Hennings, executive director of the Washington Association of Wheat Growers, called Simpson's plan a pie-in-the-sky approach to what has been a serious effort on the part of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Bonneville Power Administration, NOAA Fisheries and many regional players for salmon and dams to coexist—at least at the dams with fish passage.

“It is frustrating and sad for the Representative to suggest that all of the work that has been accomplished to ensure salmon survival on the lower Snake River has been for nothing, and that his idea of forward progress is to breach four dams in Washington. This plan does not comprehend the devastation removing the four lower Snake River dams would have on industries, the environment, the economy, safety, reliability in moving crops and crop inputs, and our communities. Even if possible, the price tag is likely far beyond \$32 billion for the region and beyond. Rep. Simpson—who represents a large agricultural constituency in his district—should know better,” she said.

Squires said Simpson's proposal is another of many efforts to breach the dams and should not stand. Aside from the fact that almost all of the political representatives from the Northwest have supported the dams and the congressionally authorized multiple uses, his proposal is inflammatory and would require multiple regulatory, budgetary, authorizing and appropriations changes that may never happen, not to mention the approval of Congress and the Administration.

“This is yet another instance of someone looking at successful Inland Northwest infrastructure as a way to take the pressure off their own inadequate facilities and operations and not even look at the most common factor impacting West Coast fish runs—the ocean,” Squires said. “We expect and deserve better.”

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