

## Snake River Dams

## Simpson defends dam-breaching plan

By MATTHEW WEAVER  
Capital Press

U.S. Rep. Mike Simpson defended his \$33.5 billion plan to breach four dams on the Lower Snake River during a Tuesday conference call with Idaho agricultural leaders.

"I'm sure you're all kind of wondering why the hell I kicked the hornet's nest," Simpson, an Idaho Republican, said during a Food Producers of Idaho conference call.

Simpson said environmentalists are likely to continue their lawsuits and legal appeals to save salmon runs until the dams are either removed or become too expensive to operate.

"While a judge can't order a dam taken out, a judge can make it so damned expensive that it doesn't make sense to keep," he said. "What



Rep. Mike Simpson

I'm searching for is some solutions. If you've got a better idea, tell me. That's all I'm asking."

Simpson hasn't yet introduced any legislation in the U.S. House.

He was asked what drives his belief that the salmon would recover if Lower Granite, Little Goose, Lower Monumental and Ice Harbor dams are removed.

"I can't guarantee that anything will work," he said. "It's a complex biological system. ... I'm not a fish biologist, but what I can tell you is listening to those people who are experts in fish biology, almost all of them will agree that your only chance of recovering salmon is to remove the dams."

Other factors impact salmon, Simpson said, but fish runs that don't involve the four dams still are at sustainable levels.

The four dams put salmon runs at "extinction levels," he said.

Without taking action, the salmon will go extinct, Simpson said.

"I'm positive of that," he said.

River navigation advocates say rail and trucks are not economically or environmentally sustainable alternatives to barging wheat and supplies on that part of the Snake River.

Simpson was asked about the effect of removing the dams on grain exports moving down the river and crop nutrients coming upstream.

"If nobody can meet the need, why are we even talking about this?" Simpson said. "The reality

is they will grow to meet the need."

Simpson said twice during the call that the amount of grain being barged on the river is decreasing.

That's incorrect, Kristin Meira, executive director of the Pacific Northwest Waterways Association, told the Capital Press.

"It is the same claim we've heard from dam breaching advocates, and he is repeating it," Meira said, calling overall tonnage "remarkably stable" over the last decade.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and Institute for Water Resources show an average of roughly 3.6 million tons of commodities, including wheat, was moved each year from 2009 to 2018. Wheat shipments averaged roughly 2.4 million tons from 2012 to 2018.

Simpson and dam breaching advocates may assume that unit

train loop tracks built in eastern Washington resulted in wheat not being shipped on the river, Meira said. Those loop tracks make it possible for wheat that was already moving by rail to move more efficiently, she said.

Under Simpson's concept, farmers participating in a voluntary watershed partnership program would be exempt from lawsuits pertaining to the Clean Water Act, the National Environmental Policy Act and Endangered Species Act.

The environmental groups responsible for most lawsuits and Native American tribes have agreed, Simpson said.

"It doesn't mean there won't be some other lawsuit in some other arena," he said. "But I think this will end most of the lawsuits that we can anticipate."

## Power company: Dam removal would hurt reliability, raise costs

By MATTHEW WEAVER  
Capital Press

U.S. Rep. Mike Simpson's \$33.5 billion plan to remove four dams on the Lower Snake River would hurt the reliability of the region's power grid and increase rates, a representative of a regional power company says.

"Hydropower has been our savior to not only have reliable, but also affordable energy," said Andy Barth, business development and community relations officer for Inland Power and Light.

Inland Power serves 13 counties in eastern Washington and northern Idaho. Avista primarily serves urban areas, while Inland Power serves most of the rural areas.

Roughly 83% of the region's power is generated by dams, and 11% by nuclear generators.

That keeps power rates among the lowest in the

country, Barth said. The national average rate is 13.04 cents per kilowatt-hour. Inland Power's is 8.37 cents.

Barth spoke during the recent Spokane Ag Show.

Simpson, an Idaho Republican, has not proposed legislation, but in February released a \$33.5 billion "concept" for salmon recovery, which includes removing the Lower Granite, Little Goose, Lower Monumental and Ice Harbor dams on the lower Snake River in 2030 and 2031.

Breaching the four dams would remove 1,000 megawatts of peak capacity from the power grid, Barth said.

"As of right now, there is no plan for how we are going to replace that with reliable energy sources, something that can produce around the clock," Barth said. "If Washington is not careful, we will experience the rolling blackouts that California did. It's a matter of 'when,' and not



Associated Press File

The Lower Granite Dam on the Snake River near Pomeroy, Wash. It is one of four dams that would be breached under a proposal by U.S. Rep. Mike Simpson.

'if.'"

One thousand megawatts can power 800,000 homes, Barth said.

The power grid peak capacity is currently 92.3 million megawatts, Barth said. As the region moves toward using more power for all-electric vehicles, the demand for electricity will "skyrocket," he said.

"Taking electric generation off of the grid during this time of transition and demand increase is irresponsible and negligent," Barth said.

Wind and solar power are good intermittent power generators, but they are not stable and constant, he said.

"When the sun goes down, solar quits producing," Barth said. "If the wind conditions are not just right, wind can't produce."

Eventually, battery backups will be the key to solar and wind power success, Barth said, but battery technology is nowhere near ready to be used for large-scale energy storage.

Clean, dispatchable on-demand power must be in place and operational prior to dam breaching, a representative of Simpson told the Capital Press.

Using wind and solar power as the primary sources of energy would raise utility costs, the cost of agricultural inputs and outputs and shipping, and even the cost of removing the dams, Barth said.

"This is going to be extremely expensive, take many years to finally pay off these costs and we don't have a direct answer as to who plans to pay for all of this — which usually means, when the government doesn't provide the funds, the taxpayers will pay for it," Barth said.

The concept is intended to reduce the operational costs of the Bonneville Power Administration, the region's federal power marketing agency, and give it greater flexibility, Simpson's representative said.

Direct power land use of wind and solar, land that can not be used for any other purpose, would be 567 square miles, 2.5 times the size of Portland and Seattle combined, Barth said.

"That is a lot of land that will need to be used just for solar and wind generation, and we don't have that kind of resource to provide, along with a growing state," Barth said.

Simpson's representative said the concept proposes investments in battery, pump and hydrogen storage and possibly small modular nuclear reactors, "all of which would be clean

and firm power replacement alternatives." They could be sited around the Northwest to optimize the efficiency and reliability of the grid.

This is the fourth version of a plan Simpson has pitched over the years, Barth said. The latest concept includes a 35-year moratorium on dam litigation.

"This little tidbit has a lot of people who would normally oppose the breaching of the dams at least stopping to listen," Barth said.

The moratorium does not cover all dam litigation, just certain parts of the fish recovery process, Barth said.

"Rather than an overarching dam litigation protection, it's very specific and there can still be dam litigation on other sections of the dam fight," Barth said.

Normally, Congress cannot dictate what courts do, he said, adding that Inland Power wants assurances that the courts would uphold the litigation moratorium.

Barth said the power company "honestly" doesn't know how likely Simpson's plan is to move forward. Simpson has claimed the plan won't happen without the support of all Pacific Northwest lawmakers, Barth said.

"He knows that if you say dam breaching, it is a conversation stopper, but he's asking producers to look at the concept," Simpson's representative said.

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\*\*Crude protein=60-day running averages and uNDF240=four-year running average (Combs, D. 2015. Relationship of NDF digestibility to animal performance. In: State Dairy Nutrition Conference, 101-112. Retrieved from https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/5350/d626b16e4ef582ad38091e1d280b9d4f.

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