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Our View

Simpson gains consensus on dam removal plan

In crafting his plan for the removal of the dams on the lower Snake River, Rep. Mike Simpson has managed to forge consensus between farm, shipping and environmental interests on his idea. They all hate it.

Blessed are the peacemakers. They may be children of God, but often find surprisingly little support at home.

Simpson, R-Idaho, has not proposed legislation, but on Feb. 7 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.

It is a bold plan, a grand compromise that seeks to address the competing needs of those who want the dams removed and those who depend on the status quo for their livelihoods, electrical energy, transportation and irrigation.

In short, Simpson's plan would:

- Require that the electrical power generated by the dams be replaced, and that the new infrastructure would be operational before the dams are breached.

- Provide money for river restoration, the development of transportation infrastructure to replace barge traffic, economic development for communities impacted by the breaching, watershed projects and irrigation infrastructure.



Ice Harbor Dam on the Lower Snake River holds back Lake Sacajawea, the source of irrigation water for 47,000 acres of farmland. An Idaho congressman has proposed breaching it and three other dams.

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

- Require that all other dams in the Columbia Basin that generate more than 5 megawatts of electricity be granted an automatic 35-year license extension.

- Prohibit for 35 years any litigation related to anadromous fish within the Columbia River system under the Endangered Species Act, National Environmental Policy Act or the Clean Water Act, and stay any ongoing litigation.

As we said, a grand compromise, but one that none of the major stakeholders will accept.

Despite promises that their concerns will be addressed, farmers and ranchers worry about whether they will get the water they need, or will be able to ship product. Electric utilities worry they won't have a reliable source of power and barge interests worry about their jobs disappearing.

Environmental interests love the idea of breaching the dams, but leaving the others unchallenged for 35 years is crazy talk. And filing lawsuits is their *raison d'être*.

A group of 17 environmental organizations says Simpson's plan would

speed up salmon extinction and harm human health, calling it "untenable."

In releasing the plan, Simpson said he didn't draft legislation because an ambitious concept such as he proposed needs to involve all the stakeholders and the states impacted.

We don't think the plan as proposed ever had a chance, but Simpson should be given credit for starting a conversation. Does anyone want to talk?

We know what everyone doesn't want and what they won't accept, but what do they want and what will they accept?

When Mike Simpson talks, ag should hear him out

BUHL, Idaho — For those who know me, there are few things in this world which I feel more passionate about than Idaho agriculture and water. Both have been cornerstones of my life since I first drew breath and the political career that has largely defined the second half of my life.

They also know that among my most cherished friendships is the one I share with Congressman Mike Simpson. I have considered him one of my best friends and closest political allies since we served in the Idaho legislature together beginning in the late 1980s.

I've watched with interest as Mike rolled out his energy, salmon and economic revitalization plan earlier this year. I also watched the reaction to it, particularly in the agriculture and water user community. I'll be honest, both the rollout and the reactions have left me disappointed.

So let me start by saying that Mike Simpson cares as much about Idaho agriculture and water as I do. He hasn't just voiced his support, he has proven it through countless policy wins. Whether it was serving on the House Agriculture Committee during the dramatic rewrite of the Farm Bill in 2002 or as a senior member of the House Appropriations Committee today, Mike Simpson has fought harder on behalf of Idaho agriculture than any elected official in this state. Period. End of story.

He's secured untold millions in agriculture research funding for our state and its growers. He's successfully defeated those who would gut the sugar program or sought to eliminate grazing on federal lands. He saved the Dubois Sheep Experiment Station from both Democrat and Republican attempts to close it down and he secured a once-in-a-generation forestry reform package that has allowed a massive increase in forest management, saving timber lands and grazing habitat. As if that weren't enough, he single-handedly delisted wolves.

So when I hear people call Mike Simpson a traitor to Idaho agriculture or a sellout to environmentalists, I know those aren't serious people and I know they don't know Mike Simpson. Mike Simpson cares deeply about our state's agriculture industry and has its best interests in mind in all that he does.

My disappointment in the rollout of his plan is that it didn't initially focus on the benefits to Idaho agriculture, energy consumers, communities and more. Instead, it understandably focused on saving salmon — a noble goal but as I read the concept, there is far more in it for agriculture and water users than salmon.

Please consider:

- Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) rates have increased by over 30% since 2008 — in large part because of the billions the agency must spend on fish mitigation.

- BPA power is no longer cheap power. In fact, it's quite expensive. Electricity purchased on the open market is regularly cheaper than that produced by BPA.

- BPA has spent over \$17 billion on its fish mitigation efforts — passing along enormous costs to ratepayers and accounting for a significant portion of their power bills.

- And the agency needs to spend billions more not just on mitigation efforts, but on upgrades and renova-

GUEST VIEW

Bruce Newcomb



tions to dramatically aging infrastructure that will close down shipping and put ratepayers in further jeopardy.

Beyond the folly of spending tens of billions more on fish mitigation and aging dams for little return on investment, our current practices have other consequences. They include:

- Idaho farmers, ranchers, communities and utilities send enormous amounts of Idaho water downstream to protect Washington dams. Mike Simpson wants Idaho farmers and ranchers to keep their Idaho water while maintaining the benefits of decades old agreements that protect them from litigation.

- Environmentalists and their lawyers, along with what has historically been a friendly court system to their claims, are on the precipice of obtaining court orders that either force the removal of the dams or make them so costly that dam breaching becomes the only option. Or worse yet, the Biden administration enters into a sue-and-settle agreement that leads to dam removal in the very near future.

- The ongoing controversy over the impact of dams on fish, and the unwillingness of regional interests to even consider removal of the four lower Snake River dams, has placed undue pressure on other regional dams including those within Idaho Power Co.'s inventory. Over the past two decades it's cost far more to relicense Idaho Power's Hell Canyon Complex dams than it cost to build them — and the company still does not have a license in hand. Under Mike Simpson's plan, Idaho Power, and many others, get that license.

Whether or not one likes these realities, they exist. They're real. They need to be addressed in order to secure and expand the economic vitality of our region. Simpson proposes to address these realities, and many more, to protect Idaho agriculture, Idaho water, Idaho communities and Idaho's economy for generations to come. In return, all he is asking us to do is consider a fate for Washington's dams that will almost assuredly befall them anyway.

Perhaps this happens in my lifetime, but worse yet, it happens in my children's lifetime and they are left with nothing to show for it. Is that the agriculture legacy we want to leave for our children?

With all of that and much more in mind, I encourage my friends, former colleagues, neighbors and fellow Idahoans to take an Idahoan's approach to this important issue. Be thoughtful. Listen to all sides. Show respect toward one another. Don't pre-judge anyone's motives. Learn from one another. And, ultimately, engage in the discussion.

As President Reagan said, "You and I have a rendezvous with destiny. We will preserve for our children this, the last best hope of man on earth, or we will sentence them to take the first step into a thousand years of darkness. If we fail, at least let our children and our children's children say of us we justified our brief moment here. We did all that could be done."

Bruce Newcomb is a lifetime farmer and rancher. He was in the Idaho House of Representatives 1987-2006 and was speaker of the House 1998-2006. He was director of government affairs and special assistant to the president of Boise State University 2008-2018 and is currently retired on the ranch in Buhl.

Things I have learned about farmers

In honor of National Ag Week, March 21-27, I'd like to share a few things I've learned while working for Oregon Farm Bureau since 2004.

1. There's room for and a need for all types of farming.

Organic, conventional, biotech, no-tech, small-scale, mid-size, commercial-scale, direct-to-consumer, contract for food processors, international exports — all can be found in Oregon and all have an important, vital place in agriculture.

The myth that one type of farming is "good" and another is "bad," and therefore should be pitted against each other is just plain untrue.

I know farms in Oregon that grow organic crops on one field, conventional crops on another, and biotech crops, like GMO alfalfa or sugar beets for seed, on a third. Other farms stick to just one farming method.

Farmers decide what to do based on many factors, including their customer base, market potential, the farm's location, the crop's labor requirements, and equipment available.

2. Big doesn't mean bad.

The size of a farm or ranch does not dictate its commitment to a healthy environment, care for animals, treatment of employees, or respect for neighbors.

A farmer with 2,000 acres cares as much about these things as does a farmer with 20 acres.

Their day-to-day work may be different, but their values and integrity are shared.

Nearly 97% of Oregon's farms and ranches — including commercial-scale farms — are family-owned and -operated. Some are "corporate farms" that incorporated for tax purposes or succession-plan reasons.

These are run by families, people raising kids, often living on the farm, who are involved in their communities and are proud of what they do.

They're not in the business of harming their customers,

GUEST VIEW

Anne Marie Moss



their neighbors, or themselves.

3. Part of sustainability is profitability.

Because eating food is such a personal act, there's a tendency for consumers to forget that the people growing their food are also running a business.

Even the smallest farms must ultimately make a profit to survive.

Few people get into agriculture to get rich quick.

It often involves slim profit margins at the mercy of many uncontrollable factors like weather, pests, fluctuating commodity prices, and rising supply costs.

This is compounded by the fact that almost every realm of public policy, from transportation to taxes, directly impacts agriculture.

When regulations bring new fees or compliance costs, it's very difficult for most farmers to pass along those expenditures to their customers.

4. There's no such thing as a "simple farmer."

Farmers do more than raise crops or take care of animals. Farmers are also business owners, accountants, scientists, meteorologists, mechanics and marketers.

Many are also eager innovators, always searching for new technology to help them produce more with less: less water, less fertilizer, less fuel, fewer pesticides.

5. There's more that unites agriculture than divides it.

No matter the amount of acreage worked, farming method used, or number of animals raised, Oregon farmers and ranchers share core values: a deep love for the land, incredible work ethic, and immense pride in their work.

Anne Marie Moss is communications director of the Oregon Farm Bureau.