

Congress and Washington Legislature — CO

COMMENT CO 01

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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

Congressman Doc Hastings' Comments on the
Banks Lake Drawdown Draft Environmental Impact Statement

April 11, 2003

Having reviewed the Bureau of Reclamation's draft EIS, I must express my serious concerns about the document's 1) lack of scientific justification for a flow-augmenting drawdown, 2) the complete absence of provable, measurable benefits of a drawdown for fish, and 3) the underestimation of the devastating economic effects of a drawdown.

The Bureau's assessment of a potential Banks Lake drawdown is the result of a requirement included in the National Marine Fisheries Service's December 2000 Biological Opinion on the Federal Columbia River Power System (BiOp). This mandated study was specifically directed to assess a drawdown of up to 10-feet for the purposes of augmenting the water flow of the Columbia River during the month of August.

The *specificity* of the BiOp on this study implies that *specific* benefits are anticipated to potentially result from a drawdown. However, the draft EIS is void of any scientific information, statistics or facts by which to justify any drawdown. There is no *specific* documentation in the draft on how increased flow would help endangered fish.

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Without specific defined benefits for fish, a drawdown action by the federal government would be relying on mere assumptions and best guesses. Recent history make clear that this can be a recipe for disaster – and it is the livelihood of local businesses and the economies of local communities that will suffer.

The draft EIS addressed the economic impacts of drawdown alternatives. However, I do not believe the draft's analyses accurately represent either the degree or magnitude of how a drawdown would negatively affect local enterprises and communities.

In fact, the narrow focus on how drawdown water levels will affect certain recreational enterprises' individual operations results in the draft EIS seriously discounting the broad, certain economic effects of a drawdown. Sufficient attention and consideration is not given to the seasonal and interdependent nature of the local communities' economics.

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Hastings' Comments
Banks Lake Drawdown Draft EIS
-continued-

The target drawdown month of August is a peak tourism period for Banks Lake recreation. This tourism season represents a significant portion these recreation businesses' annual earnings. A drawdown would not simply affect one month out of a business's year – a drawdown would strike at the heart of their survivability.

In addition, the economic impact of a drawdown action is not limited to the recreation enterprises – it affects all businesses patronized by visiting tourists. It also affects local business transactions that occur all year long by those who earn their living from tourism-dependent businesses.

There is no question that the economic damage of a drawdown is much more far-reaching and devastating to local businesses and these communities' economic foundations than is recognized by the draft EIS.

The total economic impact of a drawdown and sound science, not best guesses, must guide the final decision on a Banks Lake drawdown action. And the conclusion is clear: Banks Lake should not be drawn down.

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COMMENT CO 02



Washington State Legislature

April 11, 2003

Jim Blanchard
Special Projects Officer
US Bureau of Reclamation
32 C Street, Box 815
Ephrata, WA 98823

Dear Mr. Blanchard,

We are writing to express our staunch opposition to the proposed release of 130,000 acre-feet of water from Banks Lake into the Columbia River. To do this late in the summer would dramatically impact the agricultural industries in the Columbia Basin.

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Washington State does not have a water problem; it has a water storage problem. By taking water intended for agricultural use, you will inflict irreparable harm to the agricultural industry. Our farmers depend on this supply to get them through the dry times, such as this year.

The potential devastation to the economies of Columbia Basin communities is very real. Take the Potato industry for example. The total economic impact of the potato industry on the Washington economy is estimated to be \$3.014 Billion. In the Columbia Basin roughly 12% of all sales result from potato production and processing and generates about 1 in 11 jobs in the region.

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But the lake has other benefits to the community as well. Due to the existence of Banks Lake, Coulee City and the surrounding areas have placed a major emphasis on recreation, a livelihood that would drastically be threatened.

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In 1998, the Salmon Recovery Act established the Independent Science Panel which would perform an assessment of the most pressing needs faced by our state. This panel is supposed to submit their findings to the Governor by April 15, 2003. Making this decision before the Independent Science Panel has been able to recommend appropriate implementations not only makes the proposed draw down premature, but potentially unnecessary.

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On behalf of the individuals, families, and business that we represent, we ask that you do not move ahead with this Alternative Action draw down plan. Please keep our offices informed of your final decisions.

In Your Service,

Joyce Mulliken

[Signature of Joyce Mulliken]

State Senator
(360) 786-7624

Janéa Holmquist

[Signature of Janéa Holmquist]

State Representative
(360) 786-7932

Bill Hinkle

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State Representative
(360) 786-7808

CC: Representative Doc Hastings
Senator Maria Cantwell
Senator Patty Murray