

SENATE BILL REPORT

HJM 4036

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Agriculture & Environment, February 25, 1998

Brief Description: Urging Congress to not breach dams.

Sponsors: Representatives Grant, Mastin, Hankins, Schoesler, Sheahan, Linville, Robertson, Buck, Delvin and Ogden.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Agriculture & Environment: 2/25/98 [DPA].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & ENVIRONMENT

Majority Report: Do pass as amended.

Signed by Senators Morton, Chair; Swecker, Vice Chair; Fraser, McAuliffe, Newhouse, Oke and Rasmussen.

Staff: Bob Lee (786-7404)

Background: The Snake River sockeye and other salmon runs on the Columbia and Snake rivers have been listed as threatened or endangered under the Federal Endangered Species Act (ESA). Under the ESA, agencies of the federal government are required to not jeopardize the existence of listed species. Over the past several years, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, in consultation with other federal agencies, tribal governments and the affected states, has been considering various proposals to improve flows of water for salmon. These proposals include drawing down the river level to approximate natural flows on certain stretches of the Snake and Columbia rivers.

One of the alternatives is to "breach" the four dams on the Snake River, which control the river between Lewiston, Idaho, and the confluence of the Snake and Columbia rivers. "Breaching" means removing the earthen portion of the dam on the sides, while leaving the concrete structure intact. This would create channels around the dams. The effect of breaching would be to return the river to a more natural state to improve fish passage and to largely eliminate the purposes for which the dams were constructed. Hydropower production, navigation, and irrigation would be drastically changed or eliminated.

Summary of Amended Bill: The President and Congress of the United States are petitioned to reject any proposals that involve breaching of any dams on the Columbia and Snake rivers. The petition invokes the effect that breaching of the dams would have on power production, the economies of river-dependent cities and ports, and the fact that restoration of salmon runs will require comprehensive solutions that include all parties.

The federal government is urged to live up to commitments made in the 1950s to provide effective fish passageways around the federally constructed dams.

Amended Bill Compared to Original Bill: The provision that urges the federal government to provide effective fish passageways around federally constructed dams is added.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Testimony For: There is a large volume of cargo that is carried by barge on the river. If river operations were to change, there are not enough roads to handle the traffic by truck. The draw down test that was performed did not prove benefits to fish but caused significant negative consequences.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: PRO: Representative Grant, prime sponsor; Cliff Webster, Maritime Environmental Coalition (American Waterways Operators).