
SUBSTITUTE HOUSE JOINT MEMORIAL 4010

State of Washington

56th Legislature

1999 Regular Session

By House Committee on Agriculture & Ecology (originally sponsored by Representatives G. Chandler, Grant, Mastin, Linville, Clements, Lisk, Delvin, B. Chandler, Cox, Schoesler, Sump, Mitchell, Huff, McDonald, Mulliken, McMorris, Kessler, Buck, Reardon, Hatfield, Radcliff, D. Sommers, Edwards, Thomas, Ogden, Bush, Hankins, Skinner, Koster and Dunn)

Read first time 03/02/1999.

1 TO THE HONORABLE WILLIAM J. CLINTON, PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED
2 STATES, AND TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE AND THE SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE
3 OF REPRESENTATIVES, AND TO THE SENATE AND HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF
4 THE UNITED STATES, IN CONGRESS ASSEMBLED:

5 We, your Memorialists, the Senate and House of Representatives of
6 the State of Washington, in legislative session assembled, respectfully
7 represent and petition as follows:

8 WHEREAS, The federally owned or licensed dams on the Snake and
9 Columbia rivers in this state provide the fundamental building blocks
10 that support the northwest way of life; and

11 WHEREAS, The dams provide the electrical power that fuels one of
12 the greatest economies in the nation and do so without contributing the
13 air pollution faced by expanding economies elsewhere; and

14 WHEREAS, The dams provide their electrical power at a cost that
15 attracts the type of high-paying industrial jobs that support families
16 and communities; and

17 WHEREAS, The dams provide their electrical power at a cost that is
18 affordable by all of its citizens, a situation enjoyed almost nowhere
19 else; and

20 WHEREAS, The dams provide a river route to eastern Washington for
21 ships and barges and for allowing commodities and goods from the

1 eastern part of the state, as well as potato products from southern
2 Idaho, bentonite from Wyoming, talc from Montana, grain from the
3 Dakotas, and lumber from Canada to compete in the world economy; and

4 WHEREAS, The river system is the nation's largest gateway for wheat
5 exports and the second largest grain corridor in the world and its
6 thirty-six deep and shallow draft ports serve commodities and products
7 from more than forty states; and

8 WHEREAS, By allowing these commodities and goods to move on the
9 river system, the dams relieve the state's highway system of the
10 incredibly expensive job of accommodating the truck and other traffic
11 needed to support that commerce; and

12 WHEREAS, Some have nonetheless asked that dams on the system be
13 breached to allow a more natural operation of the river to accommodate
14 fish runs; and

15 WHEREAS, In 1995, the United States Army Corps of Engineers
16 examined a wide range of options for operating the Columbia and Snake
17 River basin to enhance anadromous fish runs and compared the costs and
18 benefits of thirteen of these options; and

19 WHEREAS, One of the options examined was a "natural river" option
20 for the Snake River in which the water levels at the four lower Snake
21 River dams would be lowered to nearly river bed levels year-round and
22 the water in the John Day Dam on the Columbia River would be lowered to
23 the dam's minimum dam pool; and

24 WHEREAS, Although the Corps' 1995 study was for only one part of
25 the system, the lower Snake River dams, its findings provide a warning
26 that applies to all dams in the system; and

27 WHEREAS, The Corps found benefits to fish runs for the "natural
28 river" option that merely approximate juvenile fish survival under
29 other options that involve fish transport rather than breaching dams,
30 and it also found the costs of such a dam-breaching option to be
31 staggering; and

32 WHEREAS, The Corps found the costs of this Snake River option in
33 electrical power alone to be in the range of one hundred thirty-two to
34 one hundred sixty-seven million dollars annually; and

35 WHEREAS, The Corps found the cost to shallow draft transportation
36 of thirty million to over thirty-seven million dollars annually; an
37 increase in the cost of pumping municipal and industrial water of
38 approximately four and one-half million dollars annually and a like
39 increase in the cost of pumping irrigation water; and an annualized

1 cost of forty-five million dollars just to implement the changes at the
2 Snake River dams and the John Day Dam that would be necessary for such
3 a "natural operation" of the river; and

4 WHEREAS, A follow-up to the Corps' study being conducted by a
5 federally convened drawdown regional economic work group may find that
6 the Corps' cost estimates are too low, with more recent estimates of
7 the power costs in the two hundred million dollars per year range and
8 increased costs to irrigators at ten million dollars per year; and

9 WHEREAS, These costs would be borne by the people of Washington in
10 very real ways, with thousands of jobs lost in this state alone and
11 dramatic increases in power and transportation costs; and

12 WHEREAS, Any such breach-the-dams option would even damage the
13 region's ability to repay its debt to the federal government for the
14 Columbia and Snake River system by reducing the power revenues of the
15 Bonneville Power Administration used to repay that debt;

16 NOW, THEREFORE, Your Memorialists respectfully pray that the
17 federal government acknowledge that breaching dams on the main stem of
18 the Columbia or Snake rivers or operating these dams under a natural
19 river operating system would not be more effective than other options
20 for enhancing anadromous fish runs and that these other options can be
21 implemented without the staggering costs to the region caused by the
22 dam breaching option, and pray that the federal government no longer
23 consider breaching these dams as a productive option for enhancing
24 anadromous fish stocks.

25 BE IT RESOLVED, That copies of this Memorial be immediately
26 transmitted to the Honorable William J. Clinton, President of the
27 United States, the President of the United States Senate, the Speaker
28 of the House of Representatives, and each member of Congress from the
29 State of Washington.

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