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Letter to the Army Corps of Engineers, Inland Waterways Users Board

Submitted by:

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I would like to bring to the attention of the Board that the operation of the lower Snake River locks and dams has become a detriment to the economy of Idaho. We are experiencing record salmon runs of the wrong kind in 2017... record lows. Small businesses in our river communities are suffering economic loss as fishing season after fishing season is cancelled or cut short. This does not just affect our anglers, but our hotels, restaurants, gas stations, outfitters and guides. Hatcheries are worried that not even enough fish will return to produce fish for next year, which will continue this cycle of decline. And now the reservoirs have heated to the critical temperature of 68 F degrees and are threatening those few fish that have returned. We are essentially being held economic hostage by these four locks and dams.

The vision of fostering the City of Lewiston into a bustling seaport has never materialized. Usage of the Port has declined and it has now experienced 3 straight years of economic loss. No recovery is in sight as shipping container service in Portland has been discontinued. The Port itself has found ways to try and offset the losses in barging by developing land. It is unfathomable that the Army Corps of Engineers should continue spending taxpayer money on Snake River navigation when it is categorized as a river of negligible use. During the long lock outage this past winter, a call to Columbia Grain confirmed that shipping costs in the region are no longer tied to the mode of transportation. It is only dependent upon distance to Portland.

Lewiston could desperately use a breath of new life. Removal of the dams that create an unacceptable flood risk in Lewiston and the levees that marginally protect the city would provide new economic opportunity with waterfront development, beaches, whitewater parks, and the creation of 140 miles of free flowing river for jet boating and rafting. The recreational potential of a free flowing river far outweighs the meager and declining benefits of barging on slack water reservoirs. Recovery of endangered salmon and steelhead would be another boon to the stagnant Lewiston economy. The benefits would be felt far upstream of Lewiston, in Idaho towns like Orofino, Kamiah, Kooskia, Elk City, Grangeville, White Bird, Riggins, McCall, Cascade, North Fork, Salmon, Challis, and Stanley. These small towns are struggling as they transition from extractive industries like logging and mining.

Finally, barging on the Snake River is the dirtiest form of transportation available. The slow moving Snake River reservoirs are generators of methane gas (as measured by Pacific Northwest National Laboratory) that contribute to global warming. When methane emissions from the reservoirs are combined with barge hydrocarbon emissions, barging emissions exceed both rail and truck.

Respectfully yours,

John Twa

Boise, Idaho