



WASHINGTON FARM BUREAU

April 7, 2004

Mr. Stephen J. Wright
Administrator
Bonneville Power Administration
P.O. Box 3621
Portland, OR 97208-3621

RE: COMMENTS ON PROPOSED MODIFICATIONS TO SUMMER SPILL

Dear Mr. Wright:

Washington Farm Bureau is pleased to submit the following comments in support of the Bonneville Power Administration's proposal to modify the Federal Columbia River Power System's summer juvenile bypass spill operations by reducing spill in July and eliminating spill at four power-system dams in August.

Washington Farm Bureau is a 34,000-member advocacy organization representing family farmers and ranchers in Washington. Farm Bureau's mission to help make farming and ranching a viable industry. Meanwhile, the cost of electrical power is a major expense for most farmers and ranchers. It is critical to our members that BPA take measures to ensure access to a reliable, affordable source of power.

Agriculture is also critical to the Washington economy. Washington produces more than 250 crops for commercial sale, making it second only to California among all 50 states. The farm-gate value of Washington agriculture – the amount paid to farmers and ranchers for producing food and fiber – was \$5.6 billion in 2003. That translates to a \$28 billion impact on the state's economy. Agriculture and food processing is the No. 1 employer in the state.

Despite the role agriculture plays in the state's economy, these are precarious times for many farmers. Operating costs continue to rise, while prices remain depressed. In some cases, commodity prices are at 20-year lows. Nevertheless, according to published reports, BPA spends nearly as much on fish-recovery programs as it does operating the Federal Columbia River Power System, driving power costs even higher.

It is our understanding that reducing summer spill would save ratepayers \$77 million, while impacting fewer than a dozen ESA-listed salmon. Even without further mitigation, it seems unconscionable to continue summer spill at such a cost to ratepayers.

In addition, much of the cost and responsibility for restoring salmon runs has fallen disproportionately on the shoulders of farmers and ranchers. In large part, this is because farmers and ranchers own or care for much of the land bordering waterways that are still clean enough to provide good spawning and rearing habitat. Urban residents, for the most part, have not been called on to give up part of their land or change their lifestyles to restore habitat or provide buffers for fish.

Therefore, we urge BPA to adopt measures to offset the limited impact of reducing summer spill on federally protected fish that do not further disadvantage farmers and ranchers. In particular, consideration should be given to reducing predation by seals, sea lions, Caspian terns and other wildlife. We also urge the Federal Caucus to reevaluate catch limits that have been increased in recent years as salmon runs have improved. Lastly, we would urge the BPA to work collaboratively with conservation districts and other local planning units to fund voluntary salmon habitat improvements that do not take away a farmer's ability to efficiently and productively farm his land.

Sincerely,

Dean Boyer
Director of Public Relations
Washington Farm Bureau

C: Brigadier General William T. Grisoli, US Army Corps of Engineers
Bob Lohn, NOAA Fisheries