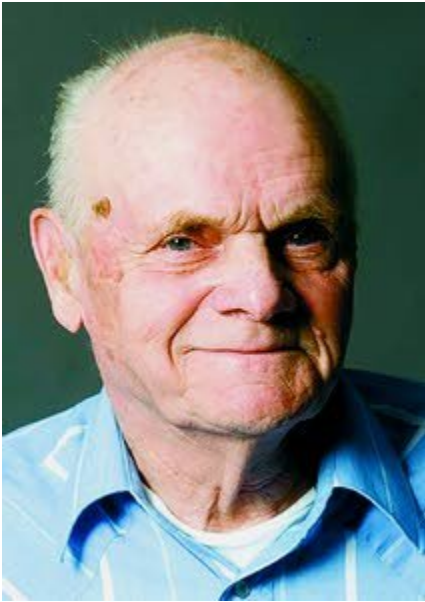


# HIS VIEW: Time to alter the Endangered Species Act

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Every so often a news report updates us on the latest legal skirmish concerning the fate of salmon in the Columbia River drainage. In recent years, a federal judge seems more and more annoyed with those in charge and their proposed attempts to rectify the problem. The whispers in the background to take out the dams - particularly in the lower Snake and Clearwater - are getting louder all the time.

Back in the late 1940s a few of us "summer loggers" in the Clearwater forest would backpack down to the North Fork on our days off. The primitive dirt roads were mostly impassible to cars, so we would usually have the river to ourselves. To us greenhorns, the clear cold water rushing by the warm white beaches framed by the dark evergreens and deep blue skies was heaven on earth. We bait anglers had to fish the side draws for our dinner, but devoted fly fishermen relished the lunkers in the majestic wild river.

It's been gone for decades now, buried under hundreds of feet of calm water behind Dworshak Dam. Some say we've destroyed our legacy, but have we really?

Before the drawdowns to ease salmon passage, the surface of this reservoir was speckled with hundreds of fishermen happily reeling in bass, blueback and trout. Paved roads allowed dozens of water skiers, picnickers, sailors and campers access to this changed - but still beautiful - area. Does society benefit more from a wilderness experience for the few or myriad activities for hundreds?

Before such dams were built, floods from Orofino to the Pacific Ocean periodically took many lives and caused millions of dollars in damage. Power generated by downstream dams provides jobs and added comforts for millions of Northwest residents. Efficient slack-water transportation helps reduce pollution and wear and tear of our highways. We also benefit from some of the lowest electrical rates in the nation. Can there be any doubt that these dams truly enhance our quality of life?

But there is a price. Dams and salmon are not very compatible. Despite huge expenditures for fish ladders, diversionary devices, water releases, research projects and even transporting some fish around the dams, many species continue to decline. It seems to me that eventually the courts will rule that under the terms of the Endangered Species Act the dams will have to go. Although that sounds rather draconian, other parts of the country already are undergoing huge expenses under this act.

Hard facts are hard to come by, but a pair of spotted owls must cost society at least several jobs and lumber to build a thousand homes.

If we stand atop Steptoe Butte or Moscow Mountain and look out, we see immense fields of wheat in all directions. The products of these verdant acres help feed people all over the world. One reason these acres (and untold millions of others throughout the world) are so productive is that native vegetation has been systematically suppressed or eradicated in order to reduce competition for the nutrients and water vital to food crops. Plain common sense tells us that eventually native plants (and some animals dependent upon them) will be driven to extinction. Will we then stop growing food crops? Don't laugh. Already in central California irrigation water is being diverted from food crops to preserve endangered fish.

Scientists say that most of the individual species that ever existed on this earth were extinct before humans came on the scene. Can't we admit that our activities also cause others to die out, too? Isn't it time to repeal or drastically alter the Endangered Species Act? The Republicans couldn't marshal enough votes when they tried to alter it and the current national government is not likely even to attempt it.

It appears common sense has become extinct, too.

**Former Moscow City Councilman Bob Dudley** graduated in forest management from the University of Idaho in 1955 and has operated small forest-related businesses in the area since. Town Crier III is a weekly series of columns contributed by 13 local writers. The Town Crier columns run on Wednesday.

