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Testimony of Corey Freeman, WA Government Affairs Director, Northwest Sportfishing Industry Association, Before the Bonneville Power Administration and Northwest Power Planning Council

September 25, 2002

Thank you for the opportunity to testify this evening. My name is Corey Freeman, and I am the Washington Government Affairs Director of the Northwest Sportfishing Industry Association (NSIA).

NSIA is a group of nearly 300 fishing businesses with representatives throughout the Region. My members include both larger businesses such as G.I. Joes and Fred Meyer, as well as smaller, family-owned business. But, in both cases, my members represent a multi-billion dollar industry in the Northwest and we are painfully aware that the future health of salmon and steelhead and our businesses is tied to the Columbia and Snake River Power System

Last month, I spoke before BPA regarding the agency's fiscal crisis. I spoke in favor of protecting our region's investments in wild salmon recovery and clean energy because the businesses I represent depend on those investments to survive. Tonight, I'd like to speak to you in broader terms. The hearing today is meant to address the 'big picture' - the future of BPA in our region, and the distribution of federal power in the Northwest. From the perspective of NSIA one cannot separate the future of the Federal Columbia River Power System (FCRPS) from the hydro system's oft-mistreated casualty - wild salmon and steelhead.

Public and investor-owned utilities have submitted a proposal in which they are seeking long-term stability and certainty from BPA and from the FCRPS itself. NSIA and its members can understand their desire for stability and certainty from a business perspective. After all, who wants to operate a business amidst unstable energy markets and chaotic electricity trading? Yet, the utilities are not alone in their desire for stability and certainty.

Since the late 1970's when salmon populations plummeted, NSIA's members have been searching for the certainty that salmon will return to the rivers of their origin to spawn and continue the cycle of life. Our livelihood depends on it. We are not able to support energy contracts spanning decades, when these contracts are not anchored with the needs of salmon being met in the river.

NSIA sees this process not solely as a process to decipher how and when utilities will get their share of federal power, but more as an opportunity to correct a system of operations that for 30 years has largely failed to recover salmon. This opportunity to go in a new, more secure direction for all of us holds huge potential. I urge BPA and the Power Council to join in this broader approach to the issues before us.

NSIA and a coalition of commercial fishing associations, conservation organizations, and clean energy advocates have submitted a proposal which we feel puts us in the right direction. Our proposal would give salmon an equal voice in decision-making processes, and help ensure that the Columbia and Snake rivers are not operated simply to generate and market power, but rather to achieve the legal responsibilities of salmon recovery. Our proposal would also stabilize and increase regional investments in clean energy to lessen the burden on our rivers to generate electricity.

Since the construction of the four dams on the lower Snake River, our industry has suffered the loss of over 25,000 jobs. I urge BPA and the Council to adopt the proposal put forth by NSIA and other public interest groups so that our businesses can look forward to the very same stability and certainty as that sought by our region's utilities.

Thank you.