



Board of County Commissioners  
**BENTON COUNTY**

Leo Bowman  
DISTRICT 1  
Max Benitz, Jr.  
DISTRICT 2  
Claude Oliver  
DISTRICT 3

December 9, 2002

Mark Walker  
Public Affairs  
Northwest Power Planning Council  
851 SW 6th Ave., Suite 1100  
Portland, OR 97204

Re: Draft Mainstem Amendments

Dear Mr. Walker:

We would like to thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Northwest Power Planning Council's draft Mainstem Amendments. Benton County strongly supports the overall direction that the Council has taken in its draft Mainstem Amendments to change reservoir and dam operation "in order to improve the balance of water uses for the benefit of fish and wildlife ... while also providing more flexibility in power generation, particularly in the winter." BPA's ratepayers and fish and wildlife population will benefit from more cost-effective mainstem operations and the Council can take the lead to make this happen.

Scientific evidence does not indicate a strong correlation between spring flow augmentation and an increased number or returning salmon. Benton County supports the Council in its efforts to improve hydrosystem flexibility while increasing beneficial habitat. Benton County also believes it is important for the Council to address salmon harvesting and salmon hatcheries to improve salmon returns on the Columbia River and her tributaries.

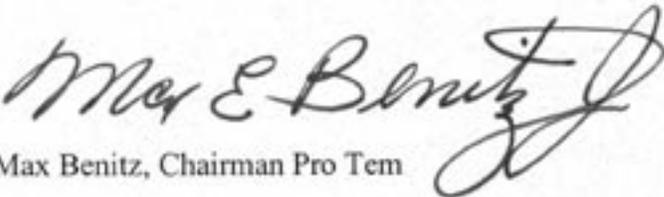
Benton County is concerned that if the focus of the salmon restoration efforts shifts to habitat in the tributaries, the wealth of the hydrosystem may overshadow the existing economies within those basins. We encourage the Council and the BPA to identify projects that leave these economies in tact, while improving habitat for salmon and other wildlife species.

Such projects include the proposed Black Rock Reservoir between the Columbia and Yakima Basins. The proposal would transfer a relatively small amount of water from the Columbia Basin for use by Yakima Basin irrigators. The water normally diverted by these irrigators would be left in-stream to the benefit of salmon and other endangered or threatened species. Potentially the net effect on the Columbia River below the Yakima River junction would be quite small and the net benefit to salmon would be quite large.

Benton County also supports the implementation of technology that can lead to improved fish survival rates while increasing power productivity. We understand that research has been underway to identify ways to increase "spill effectiveness" and new information is now available to the Council and federal agencies and that the initial results of the Removable Spillway Weir at Lower Granite were encouraging. The Council should adopt language in its mainstem rule based on the best available science and technology to reduce costs of river operations in order to apply funds more effectively in other measures.

Sincerely,

**Board of Benton County Commissioners**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Max E. Benitz". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Max Benitz, Chairman Pro Tem