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Annual Fish Tale

It is that time of the year when I get on my soapbox against government waste in relation to summer spill. I know this is my most popular column because I get more comments back on this topic than the other 11 months' articles combined.

It is a very passionate issue. Either you think I am the defender of rationality, or you think I am abusing my position by spreading poppycock. Either way, here's the scenario:

That's right, it's August again, and a federal judge has ordered the Corps of Engineers to spill water over the Columbia and Snake river dams for another month, regardless of the fact more than 99 percent of the fish the spill is intended to help have already migrated down the river.

The good news is it will cost less money this year because we have more water in the river, and the cost of replacement power is less this year than last. Last year it was estimated to cost \$75 million; this year, it is only \$62 million.

Still, this is a huge waste of money. In August, there are no little fish swimming down the river. Hello?

I subscribe to a trade publication called Clearing Up. In a recent issue the editor reported, "The cost to BPA ratepayers of ESA-related salmon recovery is a larger amount than the sum of all listed species mitigation projects in the nation."

I have not seen the tally of all the other projects, but the cost to Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) ratepayers has gone past the \$5 billion mark.

In another article, Pacific County PUD wrote to its ratepayers that they "spend more money on salmon recovery via the power it buys from Bonneville than it does on the personnel who keep the lights on."

I thought this was a fairly dramatic comparison, and wondered how Klickitat PUD compares. It turns out this is the same for Klickitat PUD. The part of our BPA bill going to salmon recovery is larger than the annual payroll for the operations section of our utility.

If it sounds like I am against salmon recovery, that could not be further from the truth. In fact, I am very much in favor of promoting efficient, cost-effective salmon and steelhead protection and recovery. I just believe you should get something for your money.

If you want to find out more about this issue, I recommend you contact Northwest River Partners at www.nwriverpartners.org.

Tom Svendsen, General Manager

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