

JAN 13 1968

# The Army Concrete Machine Is Running Amuck

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Sometimes the Army Corps of Engineers reminds me of an automated cement - mixing machine that has run amuck.

It was brought into the Northwest years ago to plug certain rivers at strategic locations with concrete dams needed and wanted by the people of the region. Now

## A Tribune News Analysis

that its work is largely completed, nobody can find the switch to turn the damned thing off. It continues to run about defiling the countryside with dams that are neither needed nor wanted.

The Corps, with generous backing from a far-seeing national government, has, as much as any other public agency, helped develop the Northwest. In the beginning, it performed at the bidding of our representatives in Congress.

Today, at the invitation of practically no one, it continues to look about for new damsites and arms anyone willing to press the point with studies and plans on how the project can be completed. Rather than urging development projects on the Corps, our representatives in Congress must now introduce legislation aimed at blocking the Corps' construction projects.

### Gives Flood Control

The Clearwater River is a case in point. There had always been justification for a dam on the North Fork, although the project was marginal. Most of the benefits would be in the form of downstream flood control.

That flood control was probably ample reason for anyone from Idaho to support the project. We should be concerned about the downstream damage of waters originating in Idaho and cooperate, within reason, in the construction of anything that will bring them under control.

But from a political standpoint, the most attractive feature of the former Bruce Eddy Dam, now rechristened Dworshak Dam, was a short-term benefit. A quarter-billion-dollar construction program would make a marvelous public works project, providing all kinds of temporary economic fallout for

Orofino and nearby Lewiston.

Moreover, the massive reservoir that will back up behind the dam will provide some long-term benefit in the form of lake-type recreation, although it is questionable whether that form of recreation is comparable in quality to the spectacularly unspoiled natural stream it will, to some degree, desecrate.

### No Great Harm

However, being six of one and half a dozen of another, there was no great harm in constructing the dam. It would still leave the almost equally uncorrupted Middle Fork of the Clearwater, plus its pristine tributaries, the Lochsa and the Selway. In addition, those portions of the Clearwater are more accessible, and therefore more easily enjoyed by a larger number of people.

There are, of course, those who enjoyed having the remote North Fork to themselves who will not agree, but if you had to make a choice between two branches of a fetching stream, it probably made more sense to dam the North Fork and leave intact the Middle Fork and its tributaries.

As a matter of fact, there was a behind-the-scenes gentlemen's agreement of sorts reached between principal conservationists and advocates of dams that the conservationists would stand aside on the construction of the North Fork dam, if the dam-builders would agree to keep their hands off the Middle Fork.

The groundwork is now being laid — at the direction of the Army Corps of Engineers — for waltzing on that agreement. The Corps, which seems to consider an undammed stream a personal affront, has started what amounts to feasibility studies on the construction of Penny Cliffs Dam on the Middle Fork.

### Preparing Study

The help of the U.S. Forest Service has been enlisted in preparing a cost analysis of the impact of such a dam on everything from campground relocation to snow removal costs on roads that would skirt the reservoir.

Ostensibly, such studies are always just for the heck of it. The Corps continues to assure everyone that it is merely investigating possible costs, in case anyone should ever decide that the dam must be built.

In reality, however, such studies almost invariably amount to seeking economic justification for a predetermined need. Does anyone seriously doubt that the study will show Penny Cliffs is economically justifiable?

Once those figures are in hand, the few people in this region who are interested in such a dam, will take them to Washington, D.C. and use them to begin the fight for authorization. The few people who want the dam would include Orofino Mayor A. B. Curtis. He views it as another public works project to stimulate the economy of his city — a sound enough objective if it did not involve the eradication of one of the last natural rivers in the Northwest.

I have yet to get a straight answer from Curtis when asking him point blank if he plans to proceed with the campaign to secure construction of Penny Cliffs. He always dodges the question.

I take that to mean he is already urging the project on the Corps, his many influential friends in Congress and anyone else who will listen. Curtis is too honest to lie and say he is not interested in the project, and he does not want to tip his hand to the potentially strong opposition against Penny Cliffs. So when asked, "Are you going to push for construction of Penny Cliffs?" he says things like, "I haven't had much time to look into that recently."

Meanwhile, the Corps, at somebody's bidding, is proceeding with the expense of demonstrating how the dam can be built if Curtis or anyone else can secure its approval from Congress. If there were not some thought in the Corps of building the dam, there would be no need for a feasibility study. Obviously someone in the Corps considers it more than an academic question.

Since the Corps, perhaps with the help of Curtis and a few others, seems to be following a schedule that, if not interrupted, will lead to the flooding of a most remarkable river, it leaves only one course: some version of the wild rivers bill, to outlaw dam construction on that and several other streams.

Idaho Sen. Frank Church, a staunch advocate of Dworshak Dam, now finds himself in the position of trying to prevent the Corps from building another dam on the same watershed. He sees the wild rivers bill, which he authored primarily to protect that stream above all others, as one method.

He is trying to make it against the law for the Army Corps of Engineers to help us so much. He is trying to find the off switch on the automated cement machine that is threatening to run amuck.