

# A Full Day's Work For The Engineers

The Army Corps of Engineers and the Bureau of Reclamation apparently will have a full day's work at a public hearing on regional river development at Orofino next Friday if they are to satisfy everybody with an axe to hone.

Early reports indicated that this hearing would concentrate upon plans for a series of dams on the Clearwater River and that there would be "unity, coherence and emphasis" behind these "non-controversial" proposals. Then the various groups throughout Idaho whose squabbling has postponed river development in this region for decades began passing resolutions and instructing delegations. The Bureau of Reclamation, which has been studying Middle Snake River damsites under an agreement with the Corps of Engineers, is expected to explain its studies in that area. The "non-controversial" Clearwater and the highly controversial Snake apparently are to be embroiled together in a many-sided argument.

To satisfy every group which has volunteered a positive opinion so far, for example, the federal agencies apparently would have to draw up a master plan which would:

1. Provide for immediate authorization and fairly prompt construction of the proposed Clearwater dams, as requested by chambers of commerce throughout the Lewiston area.

2. Delete these dams from the overall Northwest river development program, as some sportsmen's organizations apparently desire.

3. Provide proof positive enough to convince Southern Idaho opponents of Hells Canyon dam that Mountain Sheep is a satisfactory, feasible and free-American-enterprise-system substitute for Hells Canyon.

4. Ignore all dams on the Clearwater, Middle Snake, Lower Snake and Columbia rivers to satisfy irrigators in the Idaho Falls region who contend that the real need is for tiny reservoirs to hold back flood (and irrigation) water on the headwaters of small feeder streams.

5. Provide for the construction of Nez Perce dam on the Snake River as proposed by the Grangeville Chamber of Commerce.

6. Provide for the indefinite by-passing of the Nez Perce dam as demanded by Pacific Coast fishing interests and previously agreed to by the Corps of Engineers and Bureau of Reclamation.

7. Work all these and other elements of this study in contradictions into an overall plan which would be "supplemental" to that covered in the 308 Report, even if it should be necessary in some particulars to repudiate directly or by implication parts of the 308 Report.

The assignment would be a big one under any conditions. It becomes a major assignment indeed when the engineering studies of the Clearwater and Middle Snake have not been completed with the hearing only five days away.

As the Walla Walla district engineer of the Corps of Engineers explained in a letter to the Tribune Friday, the Corps "will be pleased to provide you with data concerning (these projects) as soon as our investigations and determinations have reached the required status."

It will not be possible, the Corps advised, to release for publication before Friday figures

on height, power production, cost, water storage and inundation problems, for example, on each of the dams proposed. "Our conclusions in this respect are far from final," the Corps reported.

The Bureau of Reclamation, meanwhile, was still drilling test holes at the Mountain Sheep site. Test tunnels probably will be finished by the end of this week, a contractor's spokesman said Friday. Core samples will remain to be analyzed after that.

Some of the forecasters seemed to be considerably ahead of the engineers. For example, John Corlett, Boise political writer, ventures the opinion in the Tribune today that "the Bureau will find Mountain Sheep with an eight-mile diversion tunnel from the Salmon feasible and practical."

That seems to be a fairly safe forecast. The physical characteristics of the Mountain Sheep site are roughly similar to those of the Hells Canyon site which both the Bureau and Corps have found feasible and practical. Mountain Sheep has been considered previously on a preliminary basis as a possible alternative site for Nez Perce dam by the Bureau and Corps. (It has not been considered as an alternative for Hells Canyon, and neither have the proposed Clearwater dams.)

Corlett also "ventures that those attending the Orofino meeting will learn that the dams proposed by the Army Engineers would provide more storage and more power at less cost than the high Hells Canyon dam."

That would seem to be jumping the gun just a trifle, what with the Federal Power Commission still debating how much power Hells Canyon would produce and how much it would cost and the Corps of Engineers disclosing just a week before the hearing that "as we have not yet established a definite plan of improvement (on the Clearwater and Middle Snake), we, of course, have not presented such a plan to any individuals or organizations."

Even if the Corps of Engineers should complete its computations in time to prove or disprove this prediction at the hearing, however, the public would do well to remember that there are two general types of "alternate sites" for dams—the engineering type and the political type.

The Clearwater dams and Mountain Sheep have been suggested individually and collectively as sound alternatives to Hells Canyon dam by certain political figures. The Clearwater dams have been proposed tentatively as supplemental dams in the overall river development plan by government engineers. Mountain Sheep has been mentioned as a possible alternative to Nez Perce by government engineers. The real alternative to Hells Canyon are the dams proposed by the Idaho Power Co., and they don't fill the needs of the region. Any unfavorable comparison of Hells Canyon with either the Clearwater or Mountain Sheep dams by government engineers would constitute an engineering disavowal of previous declarations of engineering fact. The politicians, of course, can compare as freely as they wish.—B. J.