

September 12, 1974  
7717 Ustick Rd.  
Boise, Idaho 83704

Senator Frank Church  
Room 245 - Russell Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Church:

I address you to thank you for the Hells Canyon Bill that has been reported out of committee. It is sound legislation for recognition and protection of our natural resource base. The Idaho Chapter of the Wildlife Society believes however, there is an area of serious omission that we would draw to your attention and ask your consideration and support for its inclusion in final legislation for Hells Canyon. It is the Rapid River drainage.

As you are well aware, the Rapid River Salmon Hatchery is a hatchery among hatcheries born of dire necessity to hopefully sustain our anadromous fishery in the Snake, Salmon and Clearwater drainages. It has and is proving a truly unique endeavor upon which the future of this resource may well hang in balance. In large measure its success is due the Rapid River, its waters and associated watershed resources. That their integrity be maintained is a must.

Recent and proposed encroachments into this drainage are alarming! Logging, grazing and roading are activities that must be excluded if this drainage is to be maintained. Given the present level of use within the watershed, serious damage and loss at the Rapid River hatchery occurred this past winter when 5 1/2 million young steelhead trout and nearly 250,000 young chinook salmon perished through a combination of high water and siltation. As evidence of potential damage were this drainage opened to "multiple use", one can cite the Indian Creek situation.

Indian Creek has a common boundary to Rapid River along its southern boundary. It is gained via the Whitebird Ridge Road (prior to its "washout" from last winters storm) with waters heading along the ridge in the vicinity of the Payette/Wasatch National Forest boundary. Last winter an unusual storm cell formed in this area. The intensity of this storm would have caused damage under even the best of conditions, i.e., the Rapid River drainage. It is an undeniable fact however that improper timbering, roading and grazing served to augment the impact of the storm resulting in severe watershed degradation.

I personally walked the Indian Creek drainage to observe and pictorially record these damages. Evidence is everywhere present showing heavy use by

Livestock along ridgetops and slopes with logging and its associated roadnet imposed on a landscape poorly suited for such use. The result: water flowed unimpeded across essentially denuded upper watershed areas to collect in road cutbanks, break and collect again to small drainage patterns, thence to concentrate and repeat in larger drainages downslope to the Little Salmon River. Benefit: a scoured drainage system, often to bedrock, with severe erosion, sedimentation and property damage. That this could occur in the Rapid River drainage is real, the consequences of which would be devastating to the watershed, its waters - the hatchery!

The Idaho Chapter of the Wildlife Society, a professional society of biologists who study, work and believe that the wildlife and other Idaho natural resources require that ethic of land use that will assure viability in perpetuity, reaffirms their prior position in opposition to additional dams on the Middle Snake River and further urges:

1. Deauthorization of Asotin Dam;
2. Wilderness classification for and inclusive of the Deep Creek drainage downstream to Sheep Creek with National Recreation Area status accorded the remaining Snake River Face from Kirkwood Creek to Curry Creek; and, additionally
3. Wilderness classification for the Rapid River drainage upstream from the Rapid River Salmon Hatchery.

An additional area suggested for your consideration that would add to the integrity of the Rapid River system is purchase and inclusion within the National Forest System of the Rapid River Unit of the Circle C Ranch. This property, currently on the market, possesses important values as elk winter range and watershed to the Rapid River drainage. It is contiguous to and, in part, lies within the present national forest boundary. Its purchase and addition to the national forest would surely serve the public interest.

Senator Church, we believe these matters are of utmost importance to the viability and integrity of the Hells Canyon Area. We ask your help in this matter.

Sincerely,

William R. Meibers  
President