

News Release

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Hells Canyon - Preserved
Special to Idaho Weeklies by Jim McClure
for release - Week of June 21-25, 1976

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WASHINGTON, D.C. -- On the 20th of June a large, well-attended ceremony was held in Lewiston. The occasion was the official dedication of the Hells Canyon National Recreation Area.

There have been few issues in Idaho which have raised such a controversy. But I believe that what Congress enacted was the will of the large majority of Idahoans.

We set aside a 670,000 acre parcel of land which runs between the States of Idaho and Oregon. What will happen to that land varies slightly depending on the exact location. But the passage of the Hells Canyon National Recreation Area assures that North America's deepest gorge will remain in essentially its present state.

A comprehensive management plan will be developed during the next three years. Some of the land will be designated wilderness while other sections along this 101 mile stretch of free-flowing Snake River will be used for limited grazing of stock. It is proper, too, that some limited grazing be allowed in some sections of the recreation area. Cattle and sheep grazing in the canyon is traditional. We have only to read the book Canyon Boy about one of Idaho's greatest statesmen, governor and U.S. Senator, to be reminded of this.

One further essential step taken in the Hells Canyon legislation is the assurance that upstream water rights are protected. They are protected, and the farm-rich southern Idaho valleys do not have to worry about that. The use of Snake River water upstream will not take a back seat. The story of Idaho's development is water, and we must not jeopardize our greatest resource to those who have used it to make our state great.

As the formal dedication ceremonies were held, the controversy which had raged for so many years remained below the surface as it now should. The question of whether or not to build a dam or dams on the Middle Snake had raised many a temper, and had been bantered

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back and forth between environmental groups and power interests. Even now there is no doubt that dams on the Middle Snake would produce needed power. Because we have chosen to preserve this stretch of Snake River in its free-flowing state, we will pay a higher price for power from another source. But the higher price is worth it.

It is now time for those on both sides of the issue to band together and build the Hells Canyon National Recreation Area we want. The work is not over, in fact it has yet to begin. Over the next three years, during the development of the Recreation Area plan, the input from interested private citizens and interest groups from all persuasions will be needed. It will not be an easy task. But Idahoans have indicated to me that it will be worth every effort in order to preserve such an exceptional resource.