

## Army Corps of Engineers Surrenders to Columbia River Pork Alliance

Eagle, Idaho . . . On February 20 the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers surrendered unconditionally to the Columbia River Pork Alliance.

That was the day the Corps officially announced that its four dams on the lower Snake River in southeastern Washington should not be breached—partially removed—to restore a free-flowing river.

Instead, the Corps said salmon and steelhead threatened with extinction by the dams should be removed from the river, put in trucks and barges, and hauled 400 miles to the Columbia River estuary.

The Corps' decision was scripted years ago by the Columbia River Pork Alliance.

The Pork Alliance is the ruling regional clique of entrenched pork barrel economic interests, captive bureaucrats, and allied political demagogues. They notoriously feed off taxpayers, publicly-owned natural resources, and each other.

For decades the Pork Alliance has manipulated the Corps like a ventriloquist's dummy.

The Corps was supposed to build the lower Snake River dams to protect migrating salmon and steelhead.

The Corps provided fish ladders to allow adult fish to pass upstream. It made no provision for juvenile fish

to migrate downstream. Catastrophic mortalities resulted.

The Corps spent hundreds of millions of public dollars retrofitting the dams trying to overcome its design error.

This effort was analogous to gluing wings onto pyramids to make them fly.

It doesn't suit the fish. The more wild fish the Corps puts in barges and trucks, the fewer adults return. Extinction looms.

Notwithstanding 30 years of failure, the Corps says it will spend another \$390 million public dollars over the next 10 years to put even more juvenile salmon and steelhead in trucks and barges.



The Corps' bottom line is simply that it would cost too much to correct its design error by breaching the dams and leaving the fish in the river.

Critical inspection of the economic data reveals the Corps committed a Reverse Enron. It cooked the books to exaggerate the costs and minimize the benefits of breaching.

The Corps' own numbers actually show breaching would produce hundreds of millions of dollars per year in net economic benefits.

The good news is that the biological and economic absurdity of the Corps' decision to leave the dams in the river and take the fish out makes even the Pork Alliance sweat.

That's because the federal courts, unlike northwest elected officials, can't be politically intimidated or bribed with more pork.

Consequently, the Pork Alliance desperately is pressuring northwest

Eventually salmon and steelhead runs that once contained more than a million adult fish annually were placed on the Endangered Species List.

The Corps' final solution for its design error is to strain the juvenile salmon out of the river and haul them in trucks and barges to the Columbia River estuary.

This Rube Goldberg scheme suits the Pork Alliance. It preserves the pork barrel status quo and the political hegemony, personal power, and sinecures it enables.

states to defend the dams against breaching, and to oppose citizen fish advocates in the federal courts.

So far, only Governor Kempthorne of Idaho has stooped to the latter. He did so against the economic interests of his own state, and in opposition to the science provided by his Fish and Game Department.

In contrast, Oregon Governor Kitzhaber and his Department of Fish and Wildlife joined citizen lawsuits opposing the pork barrel status quo advocated by the Corps.

The Corps' infamous betrayal of the public trust ultimately will be played out in the federal courts and in the court of national public opinion.

Good citizens will work to ensure the Columbia River Pork Alliance's fear of this change of venue is warranted.

*Ed Chaney is a natural resource consultant with 35 years of professional experience with Columbia/Snake River salmon issues. He directs the nonprofit Northwest Resource Information Center, [www.nwric.org](http://www.nwric.org).*