

The Pend Oreille Basin Commission “Lakes Commission”



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To: Gov. Otter, Sen. Crapo, Sen. Risch, and Congressman Minnick

cc: Members of Lakes Commission; Kate Wilson, Program Coordinator; Rep. George Eskridge, Rep. Eric Anderson, and Sen. Shawn Keough

From: The Pend Oreille Basin Commission
Ford Elsaesser, Chair
Kate Wilson, Program Coordinator

Date: December 8, 2009

Re: U. S. Army Corps of Engineers
Proposal to Fluctuate Winter Lake Level

Dear Gov. Otter, Sen. Crapo, Sen. Risch, and Congressman Minnick:

I serve as Chair of the Pend Oreille Basin Commission. The Pend Oreille Basin Commission is an advisory group formed in 2003 by Governor Kempthorne and the Legislature of the State of Idaho, charged with “studying, investigating, and selecting ways and means of controlling the water quality and quantity as they relate to waters of Lake Pend Oreille, Pend Oreille River, Priest Lake, and Priest River for the communities’ interests and interests of the State of Idaho, and for the survival of native species of fish contiguous to the Pend Oreille/Priest Basin” (House Bill No. 110).

I am writing to you regarding a matter of immediate concern.

As you may recall, we have been engaged in a multi-year dialogue with the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers and other stakeholders with regard to winter-time lake levels, as well as keeping the recreational level extended in the summer.

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The results have generally been successful, and by agreement this year, the lake was drawn “low” to 2051 feet because we expect a good crop of kokanee spawners next year, and will want to keep the water at the “high winter” level of 2056.

Out of the blue, the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers, urged on by down-stream dams and the BPA, have decided they want to “experiment” with Lake Pend Oreille lake levels this winter, with absolutely no environmental, Idaho Fish & Game, or erosion review. This is something the Corps has never done in recent memory; that is, at whatever the winter lake level was, it has stayed stable until the spring run-off has begun to fill the lake up.

The Lakes Commission has grave concerns about the impact of experimenting with the lake without any scientific analysis whatsoever. There is no power shortage forecast, and as you may know because of the economy, there is actually a surplus of unused power in the region generally.

The U. S. Army Corps of Engineers is having a public hearing today, but has generally been very non-responsive to any kind of public concerns. The Corps derisively uses the term, “Albeni Falls Reservoir” to describe Lake Pend Oreille, which as you know is and always has been a natural lake, with only its level adjusted by the dam.

We are not absolutely cast in stone in opposition to a future study of the impact of varying water levels during the winter, but we ask for your help in requesting that the Corps do a full evaluation, which cannot possibly be done in the time frame being discussed, before any consideration is done. They basically have abandoned their past custom of giving great weight to consultation with the Lakes Commission and Idaho Fish & Game with regard to issues to the lake’s level, which is very distressing.

We appreciate any help you can give. Thank you.

Very truly yours,
/s/
Ford Elsaesser
Chair