

The Pend Oreille Basin Commission “Lakes Commission”



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To: Barbara Strickfaden

cc: Members of Lakes Commission and Kate Wilson, Program Coordinator

From: The Pend Oreille Basin Commission
Ford Elsaesser, Chair

Date: December 9, 2009

Re: U. S. Army Corps of Engineers
Public Meeting re Winter Lake Level Fluctuations

Dear Barb:

Thanks for all your help on this. Would you forward this memo along to the appropriate staffers at Congressman Minnick's and Sen. Crapo's offices?

Last night, approximately 50 members of the public attended a public "hearing" by the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers and the BPA last evening at Sandpoint High School.

It is very clear that neither the BPA nor the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers has given any serious thought to the eventual economic and environmental damage to Lake Pend Oreille, and they are simply trying this as an experiment with no clue as to what the ultimate results will be. It will cause severe damage to docks throughout the lake due to the movement of ice when the lake is raised; and erosion damages, which the Army Corps and private developers have spent millions and millions of dollars to prevent, could be a serious problem. Yet, there has been no Environmental Impact Study of any kind done, and once they start recklessly raising and lowering the lake in the middle of winter, it is too late to mitigate the impact.

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I cannot under emphasize how totally unprepared the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers and BPA representatives were at the public meeting. There was no quantification of any benefits from doing this experiment, and they seemed to completely disregard the fact that Albeni Falls Dam, under an Act of Congress, is a “multiple use dam” and is not dedicated for the exclusive purpose of power generation. I think even the power generation has to be questionable due to the fact that because of the economic times, we have a surplus of power and are looking at some of the lowest power demands that the region, served by the BPA, has had in many years. In short, there is no emergency, economic or environmental, to justify this dangerous experiment. I am hopeful that the Congressional delegation will utilize best efforts to stop this in its tracks.

Any major decision like this, which is unprecedented by the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers, requires scientific study and an evaluation of the damages. The Corps and the BPA admitted that there was no recourse to any substantial economic damage in the form of wrecked docks and other lakeside structures; but that it would essentially be tough luck, i.e., that the BPA would have no responsibilities for any damages caused.

On behalf of the Lakes Commission and everyone in Bonner County, as well as everyone who enjoys Lake Pend Oreille, we appreciate your efforts. Thanks and best regards.

Very truly yours,
/s/
Ford Elsaesser
Chair