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May 12, 1999

Mr. Thomas W. Ferns  
U.S. Department of Energy, Richland Operations Office  
P.O. Box 550, MSIN HO-12  
Richland, WA 99352-0550



Dear Sir:

We are writing to voice our concerns for the preservation of the uncontaminated areas at the Hanford Site. The Hanford Site, contains the best of what remains of the shrub-steppe ecosystem that once blanketed eastern Washington. The large blocks of intact habitat support hundreds of diverse native plants and animals, including peregrine falcons, ferruginous hawks, white pelicans, pygmy rabbits, and rare wildflowers.

The Hanford Reach, the last free-flowing segment of the Columbia River in the United States, as you know runs through the site and provides a migration corridor and critical spawning and rearing habitat for fall chinook salmon. Because much of the similar habitats surrounding Hanford have been converted to agriculture or degraded by other uses, the Hanford Reach and adjacent, uncontaminated DOE lands represent an irreplaceable natural legacy.

We believe the future of most of the ecologically valuable lands at Hanford will be protected if DOE adopts its "Preferred Alternative" through the EIS process. However, if DOE adopts the alternative submitted by local governments, the bulk of one of the most ecologically valuable areas—the 90,000 acre Wahluke Slope—will be opened to agriculture, commercial grazing, and mining. These activities would devastate the Hanford Reach, its valuable salmon resources, and the high quality shrub-steppe habitat used by dozens of species of rare and endangered wildlife.

We think these are some of the key points that DOE needs to keep in mind:

1. Protect the ecologically significant lands at Hanford. The Hanford Site is one of the last places in eastern Washington supporting large areas of native shrub-steppe vegetation and related wildlife.

2. Support the Preferred Alternative, but with some modifications, including:

A. The following adjoined DOE lands should be managed as a permanent National Wildlife Refuge: the Arid Lands Ecology Reserve, the McGee Ranch, DOE's entire Wahluke Slope, the Hanford Reach, and the Columbia River islands. This will provide a large, continuous "crescent" of protected habitat lands surrounding central Hanford.

B. To ensure long-term protection for key native species and systems located across the Site (including central Hanford), there should be no agriculture, commercial mining, or livestock grazing permitted.

3. To expedite a final decision on management of uncontaminated lands, DOE should issue separate decisions for the areas mentioned above (see 2A).

We cannot stress enough the importance to the people of the State of Washington and the entire country of this opportunity to save for future generations this magnificent countryside. Do not let short term profits and short sightedness destroy this unique and irreplaceable landscape. Thank you.

Sincerely yours

Warren P. Brown / Ina M. Orme  
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