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DOE-RL / DIS

Hanford Remedial Action EIS  
U.S. Department of Energy  
Richland Operations Office  
P.O. Box 550  
MSIN HO-12  
Richland, WA 99352



To Whom This is of Concern:

My family and myself are strong supporters of the original legislation proposed by Senator Patty Murray to make this whole area a wild and federally protected region. We strongly support the DoE's preferred alternative in the draft EIS but still prefer the original document of the Senators.

Therefore please include within the National Wildlife refuge all of the public lands on the Wahluke Slope, the Hanford Reach especially its islands and the McGee Ranch and the Arid Lands Ecology Reserve.

Enclosed is an article for the Empire Press. The Salmon issue is a hot one, and controversial at best. The issue will not be addressed until federal officers take courageous stands when they can to preserve an inheritance for future generations. This one deserves a courageous stand.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rae M. Barnett'.

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Whenever I hear our Congressman Doc Hastings declare that he is all for saving salmon but doesn't want the government to have control, and demands local control, I have to ask myself, like I have asked him, what do you mean by that? Having been involved in County government in one capacity or another for many years I am well aware of the shortcomings of County budgets and the limitations of Counties to control very much of anything that occurs within its confines. How many counties or municipalities for that matter have marine biologists they can call on for information on salmon runs or experts on wildlife to share information on what development will threaten endangered species?

Bill Richardson Department of Energy Administrator recently released a revised draft of the Hanford Remedial Action Environmental Impact Statement and Comprehensive Land Use Plan which will determine land use classifications for the entire Hanford site for approximately the next fifty years.

In the draft document DOE proposed protection of 90,000 acres of the Hanford Nuclear Reservation which lie to the north and east of the Columbia River along the Hanford Reach. Called the Wahluke Slope, this last remaining relatively wild, shrub steppe ecosystem is one of the best shrub ecosystems in the Pacific Northwest. Specifically DOE would transfer management of the Wahluke Slope lands to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service whose job it would then be to protect these public lands as a national wildlife refuge.

While the U.S. and Canada are working together to salvage as much of a fishery as they can, and while scientists are frantically trying to figure out what is causing the demise of the salmon fishery, wouldn't you think, rather than tearing down dams, we would be looking at preserving the only free flowing stretch of the Columbia River? At a time when upriver salmon runs are declining with some nearing extinction's one might think that the protection of Hanford Reach fall Chinook salmon, a wild run that is still healthy and abundant enough for annual harvests just make sense.

Doc Hastings supports local county commissioners that have demanded the turnover of these adjacent lands to irrigated agribusiness's, with few limits on their future uses. Under their alternative almost 60,000 acres or about two thirds of the Wahluke Slope would convert from wildlife habitat to irrigated farming. On the bluffs overlooking the most downriver part of the Hanford Reach, irrigation has already caused soil erosion and polluted runoff into the Columbia River damaging some spawning grounds of the fall Chinook.

When you know we have a diminishing resource it only makes sense to protect it while the costs are still somewhat reasonable. While normally a supporter of agriculture, this does not appear to be to the benefit to the small farmer, in fact it will compete with the small farmer. It will only increase the pressure on the quality of the water in the Columbia and the diminishing salmon that we say that we want to protect.

The DOE's preferred alternative draft plan would be a major protection for endangered salmon, allow land that may be dangerous to cultivation remain fallow, yes Virginia there is nuclear contamination in that area that might be much better off as wildlife habitat than raising agricultural crops we can worry about tomorrow.