Andrus Center Conference:  
Energy, Salmon, Agriculture, and Community: Can We Come Together?  
Mike Simpson  
April 23, 2019, Boise State University

“I have had people say to my chief of staff, not to me, we don’t even like someone of Simpson’s seniority asking these questions. I go, really? If you can’t defend what’s going on, then why are you afraid of these questions, or if you can’t these questions need to be asked.”

“This is obviously a very sensitive subject that everyone has a stake in and everyone has an opinion about.”

“I got a little concerned when I read the remarks of Mr. Elliott, and let me say right now we are very lucky to have Elliott as the administrator for the BPA he is doing a fantastic job. . .but my alarm bells first went off when Elliott spoke at the Northwest Planning and Power Council last year. . .he said he is not in panic mode, but he is in a very significant sense of urgency mode. And then he added, the risks facing Bonneville are real. Even though we have 10 years left on our power sales contracts, it is time for real action and that time is now. That got me a little concerned about the future of the BPA.”

“The BPA is in trouble. I do not think anyone here would deny they are facing serious challenges.”

“The BPA rates were the lowest on the market. Market rates were not going to be lower than BPA rates. But all of a sudden BPA is not the lowest cost producer in the region. So that creates challenges.”

“You want the BPA to sell you power at market rates that are below their cost rates when they’re the lowest but when cost rates are the lowest you want to be able to buy from BPA. What that will do is effectively drive BPA under the table.”

“In 1980 when they rewrote the Bonneville Act and created the Northwest Power and Planning Conservation Act, they added on a whole bunch of requirements that the BPA has to pay for. In fact the BPA was seen as the piggy bank for every program in the PNW.”

“Let me go through a few of the costs that the ratepayers pay for that are not really energy production costs. In 2015, fish and wildlife investments were $757 million that year. Ratepayers paid for that. We have a residential exchange program. That was a good program. . . if you got your power from an IOU, your rates got reduced a few dollars each month. BPA paid for that. In 2023 the cost of that is estimated to be $206 million.”

“We pay Idaho farmers not to farm so that we can flush salmon through dams.”
“We spend 300 million dollars a year to Canada for flood control of Portland.”

“What do we want the NW to look like in 10, 20, 30, 40, 50 years?”

“I think the challenges facing the BPA also creates the opportunity for us to solve the salmon crisis. Because the reality is you cannot write a new BPA Act, you cannot write a new Northwest Power Planning Act, without addressing the salmon issue. You can’t address the salmon issue without addressing dams. And you cannot address the salmon issue without addressing the issues the BPA is facing. They are interwoven.”

“After spending $16 billion on salmon recover over the last however many years, is it working? All of Idaho’s salmon runs are either threatened or endangered.”

“We should not manage these salmon just to keep them off the extinction list. We should manage them to bring back healthy, sustainable salmon populations in Idaho.”

“Does anyone seriously think or believe that when the BiOp comes out in 2020 or 2021, that it will end the controversy over dams? . . . I don’t think so. I think those [law]suits are already being prepared for what that BiOp might say. We can either sit back and watch it happen, or we can do something about it.”

“We don’t have the Columbia River anymore. What we have is a series of pools behind dams. How do we restore a river? That’s the real question.”

“We have an economy and a culture that has been created around dams on the lower Snake River.”

“What we have been doing in our office over the last two years is asking questions. Trying to get stakeholders together and asking the what if? questions. . . There are an awful lot of questions that need to be asked because you need to address these if you are going to solve this problem.”

“I am getting tired of Idaho paying all of the costs of those dams and getting none of the benefits.”

“We are not getting salmon back in Idaho. Frankly, I am tired of it.”

“I have come to the conclusion that I am going to stay alive long enough to see salmon return in healthy populations in Idaho.”

“That means making sure we do whatever is necessary to bring salmon back to Idaho.”