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Dear Action Agencies,

On behalf of the State of Idaho, I appreciate the opportunity to submit comments on the Columbia River System Operations (CRSO) Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS).

I have always held that helping salmon thrive and fostering a strong Idaho economy that produces good jobs are not mutually exclusive; both need to be preserved not just for us, but for our children and grandchildren.

When I established my salmon workgroup, I was clear that improving the abundance of anadromous fish in Idaho waters is of prime importance, while recognizing that Idaho and the region heavily rely on the Columbia River System for transportation of goods, flood management, irrigation, and affordable electricity. As the nation continues to find ways to reduce emissions, hydropower is a regional blessing compared to the rest of the country. Hydropower is renewable and inexpensive and – perhaps most importantly – has the ability to integrate intermittent resources such as wind and solar power into the grid.

In an effort to improve the abundance of Endangered Species Act (ESA) listed anadromous fish, in 2019, the region coalesced around the “flex spill” agreement. This agreement should continue to be implemented and provided enough time to determine if the intended benefits can be achieved. Idaho will also continue to implement habitat improvement actions aimed at satisfying the delisting criteria within the relevant ESA recovery plans. And while Idaho understands the balance the preferred alternative seeks to achieve, we hope to work with the action agencies and stakeholders to develop more mitigation measures that do more to bring back healthy and harvestable returns.
To further improve ESA-listed anadromous fish survival and abundance, our comments provide suggestions for increased predation control, increasing hatchery production and wild fish abundance, and improving natal habitat so that healthier fish are out-migrating.

Unfortunately, ocean conditions and climate are more difficult to control. As you know, these factors play a major role in the life cycle of ESA-listed anadromous fish populations and so the region must continue to minimize mortality while improving freshwater natal habitat as much as possible. I look forward to working with the action agencies and regional stakeholders on this issue.

I commend the action agencies for developing a preferred alternative that is consistent with the proposed action’s purpose and need and attempts to balance the multiple purposes the federal projects serve. Idaho’s comments are intended to strengthen the action agencies’ analysis, and I encourage you to continue to treat Idaho as a partner during development of the final analysis.

Sincerely,

Brad Little
Governor of Idaho