

**Rocky Barker's Dinner Speech to the CBFWA Members**  
**August 4, 2004**

Thanks for your kind words.

I want to welcome you to Idaho. You know, we often believe we get a bad rap in this state. You know. You've all heard the stories – Gun-toting right wing wackos living in the woods marching cross-burning racists... salmon killing dam-building power trippers.

But seriously, Idaho reputation finally might pay off for us. I don't know if you hear about the television show Survivor is actually planning to do a season here in the Gem State.

That's right; a rag tag assortment of colorful contestants from across America will pit their skills against the elements and the wilds of Idaho. But the producers are not placing the hardy crew in the middle of the Frank Church River of No Return like you might think.

No this Survivor, Idaho style will be something else. These survivors are going to be a road trip. The contestants will start in Boise, travel to New Meadows, Grangeville, Lewiston, then up here to Coeur d' Alene and Sandpoint, at that point they will turn back south and go through Kellogg, Moscow, Kamiah, then to McCall, Idaho Falls, Twin Falls and finally back to Boise.

Each pair will be driving a pink Lexus with an assortment of bumper stickers that read "Potatoes suck." Brigham Young should have stayed in Illinois." "Loggers are impotent." "Cattle Free by 2003," "Dig graves not mines" "Kerry/Edwards" and Federal Bureau of Alcohol and Firearms confiscation squad."

The first one to make it back to Boise alive wins.

Now really seriously, you all know better than I of the gantlet Idaho's salmon must run to come back to our state to spawn and die. For them its an annual game of Survivor.

Rod Sando asked me to share with you some of my view about the salmon and water debates in the region from an Idaho perspective. I am pleased and honored to get the chance. My view I think you will find is slightly different than most. I'm a journalist. As a journalist, by professional standards, I'm not supposed to be a player. Tony Hillerman, the former newspaperman, turned Western mystery writer described our recognized proper role as a fly on the wall to the events we cover, listening, reporting and even interpreting, but not getting involved.

We are taught to write objectively, or at least to have objectivity as a goal. We are to be independent. We are to avoid relationships that compromise our objectivity. As a member of a Gannett newspaper I have to follow a set of these rules. Gannett's rules are a good as any I've seen. But these are not my own ethics, they are instead a requirement of employment. Ethics are something more personal.

The journalism ethics I follow are for the most part, the same ethics I follow in life – basically respect of human dignity and of the entire life community. The balance I use is the knowledge that no matter how comprehensively I have researched a subject, I

may not understand the real truth. I may be wrong, so I have a responsibility to show my readers plausible alternative realities to those I present.

When I wrote Saving All the Parts in 1993, I was convinced the way to save salmon was to seasonally draw down the reservoirs behind four dams on the Snake River. Less water would mean faster flows and the young salmon leaving Idaho's wild rivers would reach the ocean faster. This apparently simple idea pushed by the Gov. Cecil Andrus, had the support of Idaho, Oregon, Washington and the tribal biologists. People I considered the experts. Another set of scientists, from the Army Corps of Engineers and the National Marine Fisheries Service, disagreed. They believed that the current system of aiding migrating juvenile salmon downstream – collecting them at the dams and barging them to the estuary below the final dam, was working fine. And they were skeptical that seasonal drawdowns could be engineered to allow safe passage of both juveniles going down and adults coming back at the same time. Then there were the fall Chinook which migrate in the summer and would not benefit from the drawdowns.

It turns out that both groups of scientists are likely wrong. The latest science, laid out in several peer-reviewed reports from a federal, state, tribal and academic panel, says breaching four dams on the Snake River in Washington may be necessary to save the salmon. None of the scientists are advocating seasonal drawdowns anymore, because the status quo scientists were right. The engineering was tricky and fall Chinook would not benefit. It also would have been the latest in financial black holes that have epitomized the salmon recovery effort in the Northwest.

The barging advocates still think they're right. And the science, while clear that breaching the dams is the best solution, doesn't rule out that salmon may survive under the current scheme.

My point is today I think I know the solution: breach four dams and the salmon will come back. But I may be wrong. As a journalist I must present plausible alternatives to what I judge to be true.

In 1997 the Idaho Statesman, not known as an environmental voice in the West, up to that time, came out with a series of editorials calling for breaching the dams. As a reporter, I did the research and helped editorial writer Susan Whaley, lay out the case for removing the dams. We showed that economically the state, the region and the nation would be better off without the dams and with harvestable numbers of salmon.

Our plan also called for setting up a regional forum, restoring spawning habitat, ending fishing for five years while the fish numbers improve and to quite building hatcheries and spending millions of salmon pork on more studies. My newspaper tried to keep my involvement at arms length. I don't think they succeeded. And I'm not sure it was necessary.

For many of my colleagues the way to deal with objectivity is to keep their opinions to themselves. They hope that by masking their views, their credibility as an objective reporter will be enhanced.

I lost the luxury of hiding my views in 1989, when I became the Idaho Falls Post Register's editorial page editor and again as author and weekly columnist. My readers got proof of what they already knew. I loved wilderness, wildlife and clean air and water.

Despite these revelations, I continue to keep their attention of people on all sides of the natural resources debates.

I digress to explain to you my uniquely upstream view of the salmon debate in the Pacific Northwest. It comes down to this. I don't expect people in Washington D.C. or in Washington State or Oregon to save Idaho's salmon or to protect Idaho's water. Only Idahoans will do that.

Many of you rightfully wonder why Idaho's elected leaders haven't figured out the protecting salmon part. I'll get back to that. You certainly have seen over the years our paranoid view about "OUR" water.

About 32 million acre feet leave Idaho at Lewiston in the Snake River in a good year and if many of Idaho's Water Buffalos – the relatively small group of people who control most of the state's water – had their way only a trickle would pass through the border. The rest of us from farmers to even environmentalists are vigilant to ensure that the water that does stay in the river is put to the best use for fish, power production, industry and other uses downstream. We rightfully fear the political power that lies in the large populations of Oregon and Washington.

That political power can at times be used for good, to save salmon, clean up rivers and push our region toward more energy conservation and development of new renewable resources. Unfortunately we in Idaho too often see it used to protect the economic and political power of the status quo industries and other interests in the downstream states. When we see Democratic and urban leaders in Portland and Seattle criticize Idaho for sending too little water downstream we take a jaded view. That's because we see these same leaders approving new water development projects on the Columbia River that takes some of the same water we are putting back in the river out to water new farms, nurseries or orchards.

I have read the best science on the value of flow augmentation for spring flows and summer flows to aid salmon. There is clear evidence, especially in the summer that well timed flows of the right temperature of water can aid the survival and growth of our precious Snake River Fall Chinook. I wouldn't be surprised if research shows that significant increases in flows above the 427,000 acre feet usually provided would increase survival even more. This year the fifth in a series of five drought years, Idaho coughed up only 335,000. I consider that a tremendous effort in light the competing needs for that water in a dry year. It isn't just water welfare big daddies who benefit from keeping some of that water at home in Idaho. The blue ribbon trout fisheries of Henry's Lake, Island Park Reservoir, the South Fork of the Snake and other natural inhabitants like snails, eagles and osprey won their own game of Survivor this year because some water stayed in Idaho instead of running down to aid salmon.

This year Idaho's water lobby is fighting amongst itself over how to divide up the declining pie of the Snake River Plain Aquifer. Flows from that giant bathtub that come out at Thousand Springs have declined for the last 50 years and now Idaho realizes it doesn't have enough water to meet everyone's needs. Groundwater pumping is part of the problem but probably not even the biggest drainer of the aquifer. The aquifer actually rose dozens of feet since the turn of the century as flood irrigation and leaky canals incidentally recharged the groundwater and filled up the underground tub. Many people don't realize that Idaho actually has two Snake Rivers. One ends at the Milner Dam every summer as all of the water is diverted into canals north and south of the river. However

the overflow from the tub – the springs, replenishes the river immediately and along with downstream tributaries it grows again to the big river you all know and love. Idaho Power's dams are dependent on this second river and thanks to a major court victory in the 1980s, Idaho must keep the river running above 3,900 cfs in the summer and 5,600 in the winter.

That's not only good for Idaho Power, its good for fish, recreation and power production downstream.

I want to talk about two other water and salmon issues in Idaho: Hells Canyon relicensing and the Nez Perce Water Agreement.

A little more than a week ago Idaho Power won new 30 year licenses for its Snake River dams upstream of Hells Canyon. The fact they got those licenses without some kind of tie in to the continuing relicensing of the Hells Canyon Dams probably means Idaho Power won't be required to build fish bypass for the three Hells Canyon dams when it gets its new license. Temperature and releases below the dam are going to be the big costly issues in that effort. But I want to focus your thinking on the process of relicensing. I assume Nez Perce and Idaho representatives have or will officially brief you about their agreement. In it there are several measures to protect salmon from logging and grazing in the Salmon and Clearwater drainages. These rules and minimum stream flows will last at least 30 years. There are also big commitment for buying out farmers and drying up lands that should never have been farmed.

Make no mistake the deal will help salmon. Make no mistake the deal will not recover Idaho's salmon. The only way, and I say this because your own scientists and a majority who study this kind of thing agree. The only way to restore an abundant population of salmon year in and year out from Idaho is to breach the four lower snake dams. All the water in Idaho won't do it. All the habitat protection won't either.

Unfortunately for the salmon and the communities whose economies would benefit no one seems to be taking us in that direction at this time. The salmon advocacy coalition believes the best way to get the conditions that will shift the politics in the region is to apply lots of pressure in court and elsewhere. In Idaho they want to scare the Idaho water users right down to their valves that they will lose control over their reservoirs if they don't change their tune on breaching. In Oregon the shipping channel is held hostage.

I don't share their belief in their strategy. I believe the region needs a vision of what life can be like once the required salmon measures are in place. Those who would lose must be paid. Certainty must be traded for sacrifice.

That means in exchange for removing the four lower Snake dams the rest of the Columbia dams must be guaranteed a place in the Northwest for 30 to 50 years. Landowners, loggers and farmers must take the actions deemed necessary enforced on a state or local basis with federal and tribal oversight for a 30-year period. If it's not working the plans can change but not the thresholds.

We will need to cut the salmon pork and that means hatcheries. A timetable that ensures those who will be asked to pay will face stable not rising costs under a final plan. We need to remove the Ehlwa dams by 2008 to demonstrate that dam removal works.

How do we get there?

I'm just a reporter. President Bush has honestly and clearly said he will not support dam removal. His view is based on values deeply held in this region. I admire

people who make their decisions on principle. If he is elected, the battle continues, the wasted costs rise and the salmon recovery must wait.

If Kerry wins I'm not convinced much more will happen but it could if he were to show the same kind of leadership President Clinton did in 1993 with the ancient forest fight. Kerry has promised to hold a salmon summit. We've been there before.

However, if the Pacific Northwest's political leadership -- both Democrats and Republicans -- can engage in a hard-nosed but real effort to resolve this fight once and for all I'm convinced a political consensus could be reached in this region by 2008 -- four years from now. All sides would have to give in the same way we did in the early 1980s when the Northwest Power Planning Act was forged. Patty Murray would have to step into the shoes of Scoop Jackson. Mike Crapo would have to show the political courage of Mark Hatfield. California, Alaska and Montana all would have to get their piece of the deal. No one in the region will be rolled but those who would rather die fighting than fix this.

Ladies and Gentlemen, when I first began covering salmon regularly in 1990 they were all but gone in the minds of Idahoans. But today just as Rick, the nightclub owner in the movie Casablanca and his long lost lover Ilsa got back the intimacy they had in Paris by the end of that 1940 classic, we in Idaho got salmon back in our rivers and our minds.

Now we've got a job to do and where were going the faint of heart can't follow. What we've got to do in Idaho the rest of you can be a part of but in the end we must do ourselves and so too must each state. It doesn't take much to see that the problems of four Northwest states don't amount to a hill of beans in this crazy world. So here's looking at you and together lets win the next four seasons of Survivor Northwest Style.