

CHAPTER 3 — Snake River Dams

Significantly - greatly

Native - belonging to a particular place by birth

Extinct - no longer existing

Inhabitants - one that lives or dwells in a particular place

Environment - surroundings

Turbines - engines turned by the force of water on fan blades

Smolts - young salmon or sea trout

Navigate - to make one's way over or through

Economics - a branch of knowledge dealing with goods and services

Inexpensive - reasonable in price; cheap

Generate - to create or produce

In 1805, when Lewis and Clark explored the Snake River, nearly 16 million Pacific salmon entered the river yearly. Today that number is significantly lower and hundreds of native fish have become extinct. Almost everyone agrees that dams, although creating positive benefits, have permanently damaged riverbeds and their inhabitants. People disagree, however, on how to repair the damage to the riverbeds.

One option is to remove the dams. Native American tribes, scientific research organizations, conservationists, and recreational and commercial fishers are among many organizations supporting removal. Dams create an unnatural environment that can make it difficult for salmon to survive. Dams slow a river's flow and cause an increase in water temperature that salmon cannot tolerate. Turbines in a dam kill smolts that travel with the flow of the river when the water pulls them through these turbines. Those salmon that do survive grow into adult spawning salmon and swim back up the river. The turbines remain a problem, making the river impossible for the fish to navigate.

Although dams play a role in the decline of salmon, they also play a role in the economics of rural life. Dams provide electricity and irrigation and allow waterways to be navigated. Farmers receive inexpensive irrigation water because of the dams, and these farmers can generate electricity with the unused irrigation water and sell it for profit. Especially in agricultural communities, the removal of dams would greatly affect people's ability to earn a living. Dams are not the only suspects in the case of diminishing salmon. Weather variation and unexplainable changes in ocean conditions also could be factors, and less blame could be placed on the dams.

The issue of dam removal on the Snake River is nowhere near solved. Using the facts given, explain which side makes more sense to you.