

“My Turn” in Methow Valley News
August 3, 2005
By Katharine Bill

‘Criticize by creating,’ --Michelangelo.

As I read last week’s Methow Valley News, I felt unwilling to let my own critical words about the Upper Columbia Salmon Recovery Plan go by without additional explanation.

First of all, I recognize that there’s a lot at stake in this process. That means fear may dominate over open minds and practical remedies. However, I believe that the salmon recovery challenge presents very significant opportunities. Many talented people have already put thousands of hours into creating a detailed Salmon Recovery Plan for our region. In my opinion it is an excellent, voluntary, incentive based plan. It offers funding for restoration and protection of high quality areas, and it offers a roadmap to recover listed species.

As a community, to turn our backs on this plan, at this point, would be a real loss, both economically and ecologically. My biggest concern over the current plan is the threat of polarization that comes with it. That is why I think that a better explanation of the plan and its assumptions is so crucial. I believe that when the plan is actually read and understood, it will become apparent that it considers the needs of both people and fish. The two go hand in hand in the recovery process.

Recently someone suggested to me a Salmon Recovery 101 workshop. Today questions of whether our ‘wild’ salmon are truly native to this watershed, whether wild fish are really different than hatchery fish, whether salmon are truly endangered and whether increasing water levels in our local rivers makes a bit of difference, buzz through our community like yellowjackets. There is a need for basic explanation.

It is unrealistic to expect community members to adopt a complex 400-page plan that could affect their land and water use, without some explanation. Otherwise the information deluge results in anger at the perceived waste of time and money. To me this anger adds further irony, because the plan actually offers a lot to this region. It is designed not to repeat the mistakes of other regions, and includes real goals and tangible incentives.

It is my dream that our community members (old and new) can come together and learn about opportunities, both in terms of new partnerships and new financial incentives. According to the Salmon Recovery Plan, \$95 million could be spent in the Upper Columbia region to help recover salmon. This investment could increase property values, improve and protect wildlife habitat and stimulate our economy.

The salmon that return to the Methow navigate through 9 dams, predators, gill nets and polluted waters. The plan to save them will likely face a similar gauntlet. As a practical, common sense community, I hope that we can put our frustrations behind us via some patient explanation, and find a way to integrate fish recovery into part of living in the Methow. Can we afford to let this one get away?