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## **Who is McMorris Rodgers looking after?**

Having your attorney tell you what you want to hear is comforting enough in a private office.

But when the prosecutor shreds your advocate's flimsy case in the courtroom, you get sent off to jail - and he still gets paid.

Advocates of the lower Snake River dam system should keep that in mind as they consider what Congresswoman Cathy McMorris Rodgers, R-Wash., has been doing on their behalf. Joining with four House colleagues - Reps. Jaime Herrera Beutler and Dan Newhouse, both R-Wash., Greg Walden, R-Oregon, and Kurt Schrader, D-Ore. - McMorris Rodgers wants to pass legislation circumventing U.S. District Court Judge Michael Simon's ruling forcing the federal dam community to allow more spill to help young fish migrate to the Pacific.

Last year, Simon tore up the federal government's latest fish recovery plan as inadequate and ordered a new one.

Here's where the McMorris Rodgers team goes wobbly:

- "Hundreds of millions of ratepayer dollars have successfully adapted (the dam system) to accommodate record salmon runs, where an average of 97 percent of young salmon successfully make it past the dams," said Herrera Beutler.

Technically correct, assuming you look at the percentage of salmon survival at each dam and no more.

Take the entire eight-dam system on the Snake and Columbia rivers into account, however, and fish survival falls in the 70 percent range.

Factor in fish mortality in the pools of slackwater behind the dams - due to warmer water, slow currents, predators, disease and disorientation - and fish survival slips to about half.

- "Since 2014, more than 2.5 million adult salmon and steelhead passed Bonneville Dam, the highest returns since they began counting in 1938," McMorris Rodgers wrote in an op-ed published Nov. 23 by the Walla Walla Union-Bulletin.

It's true that about 2 million salmon passed the Columbia Dam in 1938.

It's also true that an equal number of fish were caught before they had a chance to reach that point.

In other words, there was a base of 4 million wild fish in 1938.

Seventy-six years later, 80 percent of the fish that returned to the Columbia River under strict harvesting limits were reared in hatcheries.

In other words, only 400,000 wild salmon - the focus of the fish preservation efforts - made it back. That's a decline of 90 percent since 1938.

- "To replace the energy produced by these dams and consumed by our region, we'd need more than six coal-fired power plants or three nuclear facilities to get the reliability that clean, carbon-free hydropower provides to the Pacific Northwest," said Herrera Beutler. Who's talking about building new coal-fired plants? The region is shutting them down, including projects at Boardman, Ore., set to close by 2020, and Centralia, Wash., which will end operations by 2025. Nor is anyone proposing to stop operating the four dams on the Columbia.

The focus is on the four lower Snake River dams, which generate about 1,000 average megawatts a year. The people who want to take out those dams will tell you that's about one-fifth the amount of electricity the region has saved through more efficient appliances and building standards since 1978.

Given the availability of renewables and more energy savings anticipated through increased efficiencies in the future, the Northwest is having something of an electrical glut.

The scare tactics fall flat.

So what is McMorris Rodgers up to here?

If she wants to plead her case to a national audience, wouldn't it make sense to seek out the best information available - from objective sources such as the Congressional Research Service and the Government Accountability Office?

If she wanted to preserve navigation, hydropower, recreation and irrigation, don't you think McMorris Rodgers would be seeking a compromise at a larger table with both dam and fish advocates?

Instead, the Washington Republican is pandering to her voters, relying upon slogans that will flame out the second they're exposed to an honest debate on the national stage.

McMorris Rodgers' political base may reward her with another term in Congress. But with the credibility of her exaggerated claims shot down, her constituents may find it even more difficult down the road to argue their case for the dams.

Whose interests does that serve? - M.T