

THE COLUMBIA RIVER'S REGION: POLITICS, PLACE AND ENVIRONMENT
IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST, 1933-PRESENT

by
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This dissertation argues that Columbia River management and politics have been shaped ever since the New Deal by a conception of the Columbia River as the defining feature of the Pacific Northwest region. The study examines how that conception was developed, how it became institutionalized within and by a government agency, the Bonneville Power Administration, and what its impacts have been. Drawing on a mix of archival materials, published and unpublished secondary accounts, interviews, and the author's experience working on Columbia River policy, the dissertation shows that the definition of a Columbia River-centered Pacific Northwest was laid out in 1935 by the four-state Pacific Northwest Regional Planning Commission, influenced in part by a "regionalist" ideal of shared social and environmental well-being. It was institutionalized but narrowed into the federal BPA in 1937. Soon, a three-and-a-half-state Pacific Northwest consisting of Washington, Oregon, Idaho and western Montana was being knit

together by shared transmission lines and uniformly inexpensive power rates, and by a federal power agency that positioned itself as a regional Chamber of Commerce.

Since the Second World War, the Columbia River-centered Pacific Northwest has shaped its collective economic fortunes around exclusive regional access to BPA-provided Columbia River hydropower. But geographically distributed wealth did not end political conflict; private power companies, state governors, Native American tribes, and fish and wildlife agencies have had to be accommodated with distributions of BPA power and money. BPA-centered Columbia River management has through political conflict gradually expanded to serve wider interests, moving closer to the New Deal regionalist ideal.

Yet in controversial decisions since 2000, Columbia River managers have chosen to risk wild salmon rather than breach federal Columbia River hydropower dams or allow Pacific Northwest power costs to escalate. They have done this because they have prioritized the most fundamental, and the most regional, Columbia River benefit of all: broadly shared inexpensive power. Understanding the opportunities and constraints of BPA-centered regional Columbia River management is essential in order to meet upcoming Columbia River policy challenges.

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To the many people who work to further a Pacific Northwest and Columbia River that sustain vibrant human communities and ecosystems. May this dissertation contribute to the continual learning, discussions and efforts that help us instill our goals into the place and river that, despite our differences and our different ways of understanding them, we all love.

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CHAPTER I

THE COLUMBIA RIVER'S PACIFIC NORTHWEST: VISIONS AND REALITIES

EXAMINING REGIONAL RIVER MANAGEMENT

This dissertation argues that Columbia River management and politics have been shaped ever since the New Deal by a conception of the Columbia River as the defining feature of the Pacific Northwest region. The Columbia River's region might seem to be a nebulous, trivial, esoteric or mystical topic, but it is none of these. The union of the Pacific Northwest region with the Columbia River has been centrally influential to the history of both, and is a key factor in determining who and what benefits in the outcomes of current conflicts over river management. The Columbia River's Pacific Northwest has embedded within it a remarkably well-defined regional geography, set of ideals and goals, political and institutional structures, relationships with both smaller and larger geographic scales, deep-rooted fractures, and a single bottom-line priority: regionally distributed inexpensive electric power. These specifics reflect the fact that the region-river bond is not somehow eternal or organic, as it is often imagined to be, but is rather a historical artifact, conceived and institutionalized in particular geographical and historical contexts. Since its institutionalization, the region-river bond has evolved, but within constraints set from its inception. These constraints are still active today. They drive and limit the options for adjusting river management to better support natural hydrological and ecological processes, for restoring populations of the river's flagship species, its salmon, and for providing viable livelihoods for the people who fish for those salmon –

from the many Native American tribes of the Columbia Basin to the commercial fishing communities from the mouth of the Columbia to Alaska.

The relevance of this dissertation's historical perspective to current events can perhaps best be conveyed by sketching my intellectual journey, for I began as many others interested in Columbia River management have begun, focused on furthering salmon protection. I was committed as well to integrating the protection of ecosystems and nonhuman species with sustaining diverse human communities. I was moved in particular by the plight of the once-prolific salmon themselves (Lichatowich 1999; Cone 1995), and by the legal and moral case that the federal government needed to meet Columbia Basin Native American tribes' never-rescinded, indeed treaty-reserved, right to catch salmon – the fish that once sustained some of the densest populations of native peoples in North America (Cohen 1986). And I was inspired by the ideas promoted by many of a Columbia River or salmon region that could work toward collective environmental and social benefit (e.g. Wolf and Zuckerman 2003; Lee 1993, 1995; Cone 1995).¹ My quest was to understand why this was so much more difficult than it seemed it should be. Despite my initial focus on the physical river and its salmon, and inclusion of people at the political margins, I have ended up with a history about ideas, institutions and politics at the center of a region and its river, a river and its region – and a particular interest in an unusual regional federal electric power agency. The aim of this introductory chapter is to help the reader understand why my focus changed. I conclude this chapter with a discussion of the major aims of this dissertation, a brief description of the work's sources and methods, and an outline of the succeeding chapters.

1. My first major research proposal was to compare the effectiveness of attempts at meeting wide social and ecological needs of large-scale versus small-scale watershed management within the Columbia Basin. I abandoned this when I realized that in the Columbia Basin, there was no way to isolate the two – the two scales of organization were too interlayered. Trying to figure out who and what was included also too easily became an ever-expanding list, inevitably organized along the lines of “stakeholder groups” that had become so popular, but could too easily simply re-establish new kinds of assumptions about the range of interests that existed or needed to be represented, and with them, new exclusions. For a discussion of this problem, see (Vogel In preparation-a).

AN UNEXPECTED REGIONAL CORE AT THE HEART OF PRESENT-DAY SALMON POLITICS

In the 1990s and early 2000s, the Columbia River and the Pacific Northwest were the topics of a slew of works that graced bookshelves, newsstands, and journals. Most focused at least in part on the Columbia River's salmon and dams (book-length treatments included Egan 1990; Blumm and Bodi 1994; White 1995; Dietrich 1995; Cone 1995; Cone and Ridlington 1996; ISG 1996; Harden 1996; Committee on Protection and Management of Pacific Northwest Anadromous Salmonids 1996; Volkman 1997; Stouder, Bisson, and Naiman 1997; Taylor 1999; Lichatowich 1999; Blumm 2002). Columbia River salmon had once been the most numerous in the world, abundant enough to sustain vibrant, densely settled populations of Northwest Native peoples (Cohen 1986). Salmon populations had declined dramatically, though, and in the 1990s thirteen different "Evolutionarily Significant Units" of salmon were listed as threatened or endangered under the federal Endangered Species Act – most kinds of salmon in the basin.²

Why had this happened? What could be done about it? The chief cause of salmon decline in the Columbia River was understood to be its system of dams,³ and thus many analysts saw Columbia River policy as created by the contest between two conflicting interest groups: those that depended on or enjoyed wild and upriver salmon, and the major industries such as irrigated agriculture, Columbia River shipping and electricity-

2. Salmon are grouped for the purposes of the Endangered Species Act both by species and life history. There are five species of salmon in the Columbia Basin: Chinook, coho, sockeye, steelhead and chum. These are divided into "Evolutionarily Significant Units" by geography, genetics, life history patterns, and other criteria that help distinguish large groups as interrelated but distinct from other groups. The ESU approach was set out in a paper by Robin Waples (1991). The listings were as follows: (1) Snake River sockeye, 1991 (56 FR 58619); (2) Snake River spring/summer Chinook and (3) Snake River fall Chinook, 1992 (57 FR 14653), (4) Columbia River summer Chinook, 1994 (59 FR 48855), (5) Upper Columbia River steelhead and (6) Snake River steelhead, 1997 (62 FR 43937), (7) Lower Columbia River steelhead, 1998 (63 FR 13347), (8) Upper Columbia River Chinook, 1999 (64 FR 14308), (9) Lower Columbia River Chinook and (10) Upper Willamette River Chinook, 1999 (FR 14308), (11) Middle Columbia River steelhead and (12) Upper Willamette steelhead, 1999 (64 FR 14517), (13) Columbia River chum, 1999 (64 FR 14508).

3. Dams cause many problems for salmon: some of which blocked migration entirely. Others are deadly hazards to salmon during their migration. Still others change the seasonal variation in water flows. In addition to the dams themselves, the reservoirs created by the dams were dangerous to young salmon: they created deep slow reservoirs where predators thrived while salmon were slowed in their once-in-a-lifetime journey to the sea. By the mid-1990s scientists were also stressing that dams interfered with basic hydrological, geomorphological and ecological processes and connections of rivers which sustained diverse and productive habitats (ISG 1996; Committee on Protection and Management of Pacific Northwest Anadromous Salmonids 1996).

hungry aluminum that were direct beneficiaries of the river's many dams. The general notion was that the side that could wield greater political, legal, economic or other power to compel policy-makers' decisions could determine policy. Indisputably, the greater economic power lay with major dam beneficiaries; the commercial and sport fishing industries that relied on Columbia River salmon were small in comparison. So the conflict was often analyzed as one that pitted economic power and the political clout that goes with it, on one side, against environmental laws, Native American treaties, and popular sympathy for salmon, on the other. Salmon activists' efforts often paralleled these analyses. They tried to exert political and economic power and legal leverage, working to influence policy through the difficult but time-tested strategies of political organizing, litigation, and public education.

A better system for natural resource governance, many said, would be one in which people could think more broadly about the long-term needs of people and natural systems. How could such a system be made possible? Around the country, even the world, analysts, visionaries and policy-makers writing about natural resources proposed organizing governance geographically around an ecosystem, watershed or bioregion, so that an integrated natural system would become, in a sense, a communal resource of a particular local area or region. A sense of place, a regional organization that was human as well as ecological or physical, could then develop entwined with the use and stewardship of a resource. At that geographic scale, the thinking went, people could better see and value their interdependence; have some collective self-determination and autonomy; and access, use and protect natural resources for long-term benefit (e.g. Kemmis 1990; Doppelt et al. 1993; Natural Resources Law Center 1996; Hinchcliffe et al. 1999; Kenney et al. 2000; Sale 2000).

In the Columbia River system, this idea had considerable play. Many analysts and policy-makers, when asked how to resolve the conflicts over the Columbia, suggested that "the region" needed to decide what its priorities were for the river. They were generally clear on what and where "the region" was: the Pacific Northwest, defined in this context fairly precisely – as Washington, Oregon, Idaho, western Montana. The politics of the Columbia and its tributaries, they suggested, needed to transcend the

special interests represented by dam beneficiaries and salmon advocates and instead be led and motivated by a broader sense of a shared place and environment (e.g. Federal Caucus 2000d; Kempthorne et al. 2000; Brinckman 1998).

But this seemingly straightforward analysis – that Columbia River politics played out as a salmon-versus-dams conflict and could be transcended by a sense of greater regional good – was belied by the actual practice of Columbia River policy-making and politics.

Between 1998 and 2002, I had the opportunity to work on salmon policy, first editing a report on the lower Snake River dams for an environmental group (Lansing and Vogel 1998), and later as a policy analyst for an interstate Pacific Northwest planning agency, the Northwest Power Planning Council (now the Northwest Power and Conservation Council).⁴ In these capacities, I observed at close range the making and aftermath of two very public and controversial decisions in the Columbia River. In 2000 and 2001, the federal government made decisions to risk wild salmon rather than overly impair the federal Columbia River hydropower system. In 2000, the decision was not to breach the four lower Snake River dams – even though the government acknowledged that breaching these four dams would be the single action most likely to benefit the four threatened and endangered salmon runs in the Snake River system (National Marine Fisheries Service 2000). In 2001, the decision was to reduce “spill” of water over dams as power costs spiked during the California energy crisis, so that water could be sent instead through turbines to generate power – although spill was generally the safest way for migrating juvenile salmon to travel down river (DeHart 2002; Northwest Power Planning Council 2001; Blumm and Rohlf 2001; Barker 2001).

Both critics and supporters seemed to see these as political decisions in which major economic industries dependent on dams won out over salmon advocates. Salmon advocates called on the federal government to push the dams’ economic beneficiaries to find new ways of doing business (Oosterhout 2001; Marcus and Garrison 2000; Grunwald 2000; Montana 2001b). Representatives of industry and agriculture beneficiaries of the dams argued that the biological benefits of dam breaching and spill

4. See chapter 6 for more on this agency.

were uncertain, and pointed out the tremendous economic benefits the dams provide (O'Bryant 2000; Brinckman 2000; Hall 2000; Taylor 2000).

But the actual management results in 2000 and 2001 did not show such clear victories for dam-dependent economic interests over salmon, nor even that the decision had clearly faced one off the other. First of all, policy-makers who risked salmon *also* risked major industries that were dam beneficiaries. In 2001, in addition to reducing spill, the federal government chose to reduce or cut off power to several plants from the principal Pacific Northwest industry which grew up on cheap Columbia River power, aluminum (although the federal government paid workers' wages for several months instead, and bought back power from them at elevated prices). The government also paid dam-dependent irrigators throughout the region to use less water or to stop irrigating to save energy on pumping (see recommendations from Northwest Power Planning Council 2001; Northwest Power and Conservation Council 2005; BPA 2002).

Second, salmon did not clearly or entirely lose out – and certainly not in financial terms. They, too, were paid off. When federal agencies declined to call for breaching dams in the 2000 Biological Opinion, they instead planned and launched an aggressive and expensive program of water management, tributary habitat restoration, and support for supplementation hatcheries (National Marine Fisheries Service 2000; Federal Caucus 2000c). And when in the following year salmon advocates, angry about reduced spill during the 2001 energy crisis, moved to sue, the federal government invested millions more dollars into other kinds of habitat restoration. Expenditures to protect and restore salmon increased even beyond the previous sums of over one hundred million dollars per year (BPA 2002).

Additionally, these decisions were made with considerable regional deliberation and collaboration, if not harmony. Particularly in the development of the 2000 Biological Opinion, federal decision-makers framed their analysis and decision-making processes as regional. They consulted with state agencies and governors and the Columbia Basin's Native American tribes. They organized themselves into a regional consortium. They also linked their Biological Opinion closely to the fish and wildlife program of the regional, interstate, Northwest Power and Conservation Council (Federal Caucus 1999, 2000b;

National Marine Fisheries Service 2000).

A simple analysis of salmon-versus-dams interest politics, and of the need to transcend this with regional thinking, could not fully explain all this. Paradoxically, there was a clear willingness to spend enormous sums for Columbia River salmon, and yet little willingness to undertake fundamental change in the operations of the Columbia River dams. At the same time, while this unwillingness surely had roots in the traditional political dominance of economic interests which benefit from Columbia River dams, these simply did not seem all that dominant in these decisions. The truth was, the final decisions were more convoluted than one-sided. In many ways they *were* socially and ecologically inclusive. They also were very much regionally organized, and they rested on wide participation and a real attempt to take responsibility for diverse needs within the region. But they were expensive and arguably inefficient. Many contended that breaching the lower Snake River dams, together with investments to mitigate the economic costs to the dams' beneficiaries – subsidized improvements in train lines to Lewiston, Idaho, for example – would have been simpler and more sustainable for both people and the environment (Lansing and Vogel 1998; Dickey 1999; Marcus and Garrison 2000; Taxpayers for Common Sense et al. 2006).⁵

As I watched the lower Snake decision being made in the summer and fall of 2000, interviewed people the following spring about the decision, and combed through documents in 2002 about the 2001 spill decision, a rather different issue emerged as a key part of the politics of the decision. In large part, it seemed, these two decisions were decisions to protect the Bonneville Power Administration – not only the power it sells, but the agency itself, and its wide regional benefits.

This seemed a strange idea. The Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) is a federal agency that transmits and markets power from the federal dams on the Columbia River and its tributaries, as well as two other dams outside the Columbia Basin. These thirty-one dams are operated as a single coordinated system of water and power flows, and are collectively called the Federal Columbia River Power System (BPA, U.S. Army

5. The Northwest Power and Conservation Council's Independent Economic Analysis Board and others have contested several of these claims (Independent Economic Analysis Board 1998; Northwest RiverPartners 2006; Independent Economic Analysis Board 2007)

Corps of Engineers, and Bureau of Reclamation 2001a, 2001b). The BPA does not own any of these dams. Without the BPA, power would still be produced from these dams, and the dams would continue to provide non-power benefits as well. Why, then, would a threat to this power transmission and marketing agency be the most important driver of river management, more important than endangered, treaty-protected and commercially important salmon, *and* more important than major economic beneficiaries of the dams? And why would breaching the lower Snake dams, or maintaining high spill, threaten the BPA?

The answer I got to these questions from my interviews and document-combing were as follows. Protecting BPA drives river management because the agency provides a basic economic resource to virtually the entire Pacific Northwest, and for this reason is seen as vital by regional leaders. Although BPA is a federal agency, it is also a *regional* agency. It is based in the Pacific Northwest, with headquarters in Portland, Oregon. Even more important, it provides low-cost hydropower from the Federal Columbia River Power System preferentially to residents, small farms, and public and cooperative utilities of Washington, Oregon, Idaho and western Montana, as well as small corners of adjacent states. Not coincidentally, this is the same area considered "the region" by those who advocate and practice regional Columbia River governance. In a 1999 map of federal salmon recovery, the correspondence between "the region" for Columbia River salmon management is suggested by the correspondence between an unlabeled gray area and the portion of the BPA's service region (figure 1.1) contained within the states of Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Montana (see also Vogel 2008a). Inexpensive power provided by the BPA is a benefit not simply to several powerful industries or even just to those generally classified as dam beneficiaries; it is a benefit to most residents and businesses throughout this large geographic area.⁶ In this context, the BPA is seen not simply as an energy agency, or a resource for particular sectors of society and economy. Rather, it is seen as a broad regional asset. BPA is central even for its presumed opponents, for it provides the vast majority of funds for fish and wildlife measures in the

6. The benefits are, however, uneven, sometimes indirect, and their distribution often contested. See Chapter 6 for more on how this plays out in current regional politics concerning salmon and dams.

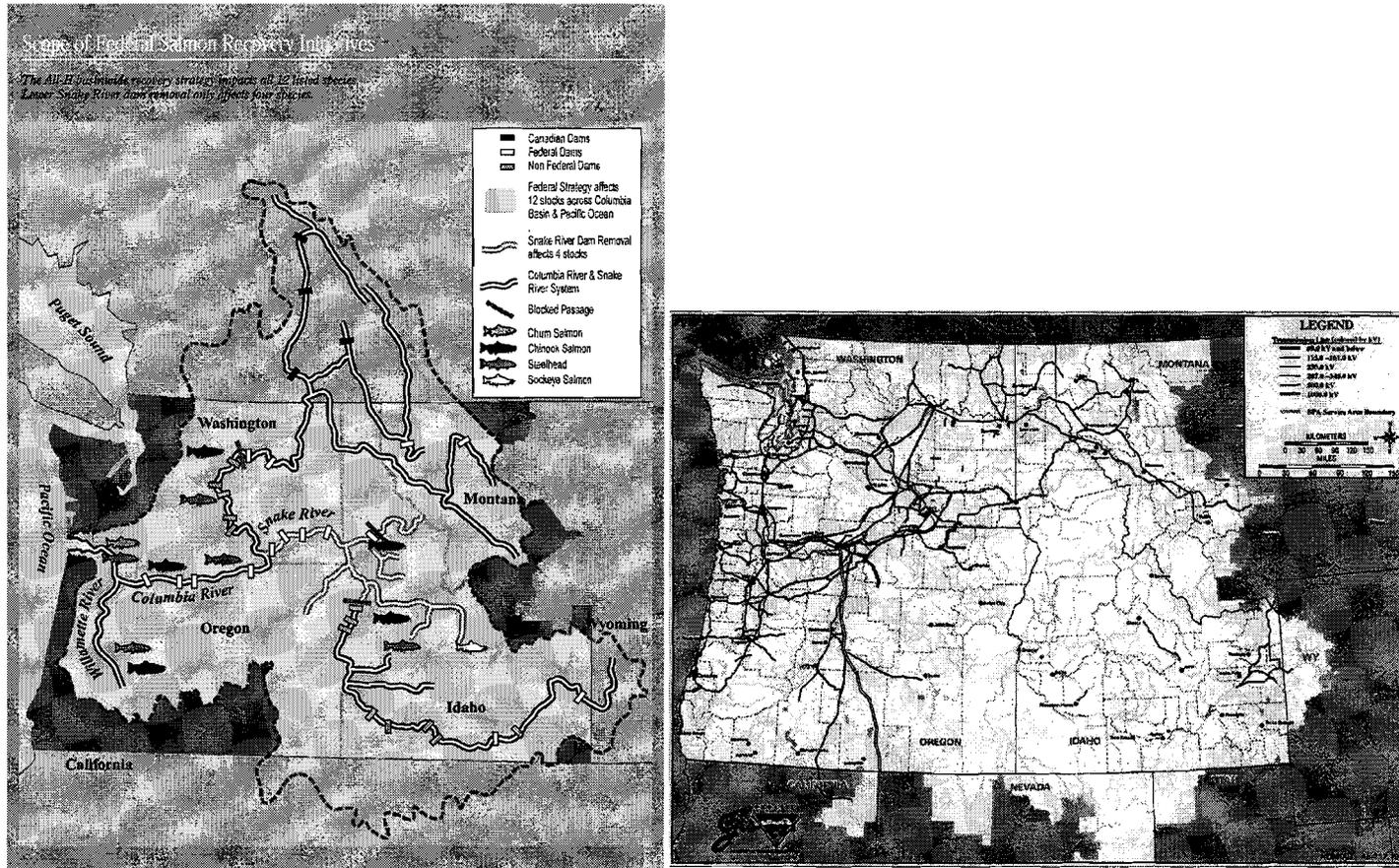


Figure 1.1. The area that encompasses the Federal Salmon Recovery Strategy (light gray area on left map, labeled “Federal Strategy affects 12 stocks across the Columbia Basin & Pacific Ocean” in legend), is specifically the portion of the Columbia Basin within the BPA service region (right map, white area). Particularly striking in this map of Federal Salmon Recovery Initiatives (left), though, is the *unlabeled* dark gray area. Together with the light gray area, it maps precisely the BPA service region within Washington, Oregon, Idaho and western Montana; the correspondence shows up particularly clearly in western Montana where BPA transmits power slightly beyond the basin divide. The map of Federal Salmon Recovery Initiatives thus reveals that salmon policy is framed by a BPA-centered conception of the Pacific Northwest. *Sources:* Federal Caucus 1999, Bonneville Power Administration 1998.

basin.⁷ Thus a threat to the BPA was much deeper and far-reaching in the minds of regional leaders than any threat to specific industries or communities, even large ones, or any immediate threat to the region's animal icon, the salmon.

Why would breaching the lower Snake dams, or maintaining high spill, threaten the BPA or its broad regional benefits? In both cases, clearly a part of the issue was simply cost. Breaching the four lower Snake dams or maintaining spill would be expensive, and it was likely that most of the cost would be borne by BPA and its customers. This meant power rates across the region would go up – a direct threat to the shared regional resource provided by the BPA and the federal Columbia River dams (Anderson et al. 1997; U.S. Army Corps of Engineers 2002).

But there was a second issue. Both dam removal and spill posed political as well as economic threats. Breaching dams would require congressional authorization. Although the BPA is a regional agency, it is also a federal agency, and the federal – national – Congress ultimately can decide its mandate, its guidelines, even its existence. There are periodic proposals in Congress to privatize the BPA, or to end the Pacific Northwest's special access to inexpensive BPA power (Pope 2001; Kriz 1997). Pacific Northwest politicians, civic and business leaders see this as a serious threat, and for this reason band together – despite their many other differences – to protect the BPA and its regional preference policy. It was feared that a Congressional deliberation about whether to authorize breaching of the lower Snake dams might also open up a full debate about the BPA. For this reason, as well as simple fears about a rise in power prices, Pacific Northwest regional leaders did their best to ensure such a deliberation would not be necessary (Barnett 2000; Hughes 1999; Swisher 1999).

Continuing spill posed a similar political risk but for a different reason. Low water in the winter of 2000-2001 coincided with the California power crisis and hugely inflated power prices. Buying power on the open market threatened to empty BPA's financial coffers. If the BPA had bought all the power needed to substitute for the hydropower that is lost by spilling water instead of sending it through turbines, the

7. Part of the dynamics of the fight over the lower Snake was that salmon advocates began to think that despite these expenditures, they might be better off without the BPA (Barker and Larmer 2001; Swisher 1999). See also (Vogel 2008a) for a brief analysis of this as a "scale jumping" strategy.

agency faced the prospect of either having to raise rates by several times, or not being able to pay its annual debt interest payments to the US treasury, or both. Although BPA has the legal right to defer its treasury payments in urgent financial times, indeed has done so in the past, debt deferral was not seen as a viable *political* option. Pacific Northwest politicians, almost as one,⁸ wrote to the BPA asking the agency to make sure it met its payments. They feared that if BPA failed to pay its annual debt payment, Congress would take it as an invitation to open a new attack on the BPA or its regional preference policy (Torvik 2001; Barker and Larmer 2001; Hammarlund 2001; Barker 2001).

In both cases, then, a fundamental part of the threat was to BPA's institutional survival and the preservation of a widely shared regional asset that is ensured by BPA's regional preference policy. Political protection of BPA trumped both salmon and major dam-dependent industries because BPA and its broadly shared inexpensive power, more than any one group of species or industries, was seen by regional leaders as the lifeblood of the region.

The history of these two decisions pointed to two immediate lessons important for understanding Columbia River politics that tend to be underplayed in the literature, the media, and among activists. First, the BPA and its political defenders played a key role in Columbia River and salmon management politics – often surpassing in importance both major dam-dependent industries and salmon, as well as the usual agency-villains of choice, the Army Corps of Engineers and NOAA Fisheries.⁹ Second, Columbia River management conflicts were not being decided by narrow contests between dams-versus-salmon interest groups. There was *already* a sense of shared regional dependence on the river's resources; and the desire for regional well-being *was* in many ways the bottom line in river management. It was just that the most fundamental – and most regional – of Columbia River benefits was widely shared inexpensive power. Thus it was precisely the

8. The most vocal exception was Oregon Governor John Kitzhaber (see e.g. Kitzhaber 2001).

9. I use the acronym here because it is actually more familiar than the full name. NOAA is the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration; NOAA Fisheries is the agency responsible under the Endangered Species Act for protection of marine species, including migratory Pacific salmon. NOAA Fisheries formerly went by the name National Marine Fisheries Service, often abbreviated as NMFS.

prioritization of region-wide interest – of inexpensive electric power, that is, an interest made regional by the BPA – that restricted the ability of Columbia River management to change in a fundamental way to meet the needs of the river’s salmon and the people, both Native and non-Native, who fished for or otherwise valued those salmon.

There were two more suggested, though as yet less certain, lessons. First, it seemed I, along with many others, needed to rethink not only the politics of salmon management, but the very nature of the Pacific Northwest region and its relationship to the Columbia River. Perhaps it was not, in fact, the physical Columbia River – even in its developed form – that united the disparate parts of the Pacific Northwest that claimed a role in the river’s governance. Perhaps it was instead the BPA’s transmission lines and power sales that united a Columbia River-centered region, and that mediated the relationship between this region and the actual river. Richard White had suggested as much in one of his countless almost-too-pithy insights in *The Organic Machine*:

In a sense the Columbia River dams made the Pacific Northwest a region. The lines of the Bonneville Power Administration marked the region's boundaries. Where interties with other transmission systems occurred, there the Pacific Northwest encountered other regions. Electricity represented an extension of the river's reach (White 1995, 64).¹⁰

The other suggested lesson was that regional ties forged by and around the BPA and its power lines, while prioritizing inexpensive electric power above all, nonetheless seemed to have supported some ecologically protective management. The existing institutions and relations of regional cooperation could evidently be extended into cooperative stewardship as well. Regional institutional capacity, together with a shared fear of losing control of the river and its hydropower benefits to outsiders through the actions of NOAA Fisheries, Congress or the courts, seemed to have been the ingredients that produced a serious effort on behalf of the river’s salmon. Though the BPA’s expenditures were not going toward dam removal, they were paying for extensive habitat

10. I have mused on several occasions that in a sense I turned an idea that Richard White covered in two pages into a dissertation. He encouraged me once when I was trying to decide where to go for graduate school and in what discipline, saying that regardless, a good dissertation would be noticed and appreciated. In the *Organic Machine* he notes that the BPA has not received the critical attention it merits. I like to think that he as well as others will find my extensive elaboration of his briefly stated insights useful.

protection and restoration as well as more ecologically responsible hatcheries, throughout much of the large Columbia Basin.

FROM HOPES FOR REGIONAL POSSIBILITY TO A HISTORY OF REGIONAL PRACTICE

These insights and hypotheses led me down new roads of inquiry. Suddenly, I wanted to understand the BPA better, and its role in the politics of the region and of river governance and management. I wanted to rethink, too, the whole notion of regional governance of natural resources and what it had to offer. And I began to wonder about the supposed novelty of present-day efforts at uniting a region in participatory stewardship of a shared resource. It became increasingly clear to me that what I was looking at was, in fact, a decades-old effort of regional governance of a major river basin – just in an unexpected and narrowed form.

Perhaps the lesson from the Columbia was not, in fact, about the need to transcend dams-versus-salmon politics with a broader regional vision, but about what an institutionalized system of regional governance and management, institutionalized around a particular relationship to a natural resource like a river, could look like and mean over the long term. Historical perspective made starkly clear some of this effort's failings and exclusions, but even a very limited comparative view highlighted its longevity and successes as well. The BPA had survived for seven decades, while many New Deal agencies were terminated long ago (see e.g. Finegold and Skocpol 1995); many regionally based alliances to protect ecosystems and watersheds had disintegrated in much shorter time periods as well. The BPA also clearly provided real benefits to the Pacific Northwest, even after so many decades – and not just to big business and special interests: it provided inexpensive power to a wide range of people and places throughout the region, and, although sometimes the agency and its beneficiaries had had to be dragged kicking and screaming, it had come to be a major source of fish and wildlife protection efforts, and funds for energy conservation. I wondered whether regional ties to a natural resource that could endure for decades like those between the Pacific Northwest

and the Columbia River perhaps required – at least in a capitalist democracy – what the BPA provided for the Pacific Northwest: an institution that legally, formally and fixedly regionalized a natural resource into a primary economic resource for a defined geographic area. Perhaps it was inevitable that successfully institutionalizing a relationship between a major natural resource like a large river system and a region, given political and economic realities, would be founded on shared economic benefit, and tend toward one-sided exploitation of the natural resource system. Maybe the legal and political fights to force Columbia River management to accommodate Native peoples, salmon, and others who had long been marginalized, were simply a necessary part of the process to achieve more inclusive participation and to spread benefits more widely among people and nonhuman species and systems.

Slowly it dawned on me that a historical examination of the relationship between the Pacific Northwest and the Columbia River could both illuminate the structures and assumptions of current salmon and river politics, *and* offer a much-needed long-term case study in regional river system governance and management that might consider its actual, and not hoped-for, abilities to meet wide social and ecological needs. It would need to be an examination not only of ideas and institutions, but how they interacted with and evolved through nitty-gritty political battles and real-world economic pressures. I set out to construct a political history of the relationship between the Pacific Northwest and the Columbia River that would examine the bond between region and river, and how this bond shaped both. I hoped, too, to uncover how, where, when and why the region-river bond had furthered – or hindered – natural system stewardship and broadly inclusive social benefits.

GOALS

I have four major goals in this work. These have grown out of my initial insights and research, but they now incorporate other important understandings I have gained.

First, I aim to shed light on Columbia River politics today, by uncovering the too-often invisible structures and assumptions embedded within “regional” organization of

river policymaking and management. What is it that is invoked when people make “the region” the proper grouping for analysis, discussion and collaboration of river or salmon management? This question is particularly important for a region like the Pacific Northwest, which, under almost any of its varied definitions, is understood to be defined and unified by its natural environmental features – mountains, forests, rivers, salmon or rain. The seeming natural-ness of the region (despite its varying geographies, which depend on the natural feature chosen) makes it difficult to ask hard questions about the purpose and consequences of regional organization of environmental decision-making. Clearly a part of the answer is that at the core of the Columbia River’s Pacific Northwest region are the BPA and its inexpensive hydropower. I join other writers who have contributed to geographical literature on the politics of place, territory, boundaries and scale (Taylor 1985, 1994, 1996; Smith 1993; Agnew 1994; Agnew and Corbridge 1995; Murphy 1991; Massey 1994; Massey and Jess 1995; Swyngedouw 1997a, 1997b; Delaney and Leitner 1997; Cox 1998; Martin 1999; Marston 2000; Brenner 2001; Howitt 2003; Brown and Purcell 2005;) by seeking to make plain the constructed nature of the Columbia River’s Pacific Northwest in order to help open up its political possibilities (see also Vogel 2008a, In preparation-b).

To enable more critical questioning of the way we think about the relationship between place and environment in the Pacific Northwest, I pursue a second goal: to historicize the Columbia River’s Pacific Northwest – that is, the specific region within which Columbia River policymaking and management are organized. This region is a “historical institution” created at a specific moment in time (Skocpol 1992; Thelen and Steinmo 1992; Immergut 1998), as well as a specific place. By uncovering the process and context of its construction and institutionalization, I seek to reveal the values, goals, political relationships, and understandings about the region and the river that became embedded within. It turns out that our present-day ideas of the Columbia River’s Pacific Northwest region are inheritances from the New Deal, when a conception of a Columbia River-centered Pacific Northwest was crystallized in part out of a “regionalist” notion that by organizing society, governance and environment on a regional basis, all three could be bettered. This regional idea and its associated regionalist ideals were broad, but

they were institutionalized more narrowly into a regional federal power agency, the BPA, and an interconnected system of federal Columbia River dams. The conception of this region and its purposes has morphed over time – taking on, among other things, a far greater emphasis on “wild” and “natural” species and ecosystems, and an acknowledgment of the rights of Native American tribes to salmon – but its institutional form and practice have not been as easily remolded in environmentalists’ and tribes’ images. By telling this history, I trace a legacy from seventy years ago forward to show the influence on both ideas about and practice of regional Columbia River management over time.

Third, I aim to illuminate how, why, and in what specific ways the regionalism of the New Deal-era conception of the Columbia River-centered Pacific Northwest was narrowed and came to favor certain resources and interests. In this, I follow in some ways the many critical histories of the Columbia River and the Pacific Northwest published in the 1990s. At the same time, though, I seek to find the ways and reasons that regional institutions and practice retained regionalist threads of, for example, wide regional participation, wide regional sharing of benefits, urban-rural balance, and shared stewardship of common environmental resources. Regionalist threads have been retained or pursued sometimes deliberately, out of ideals put into practice; sometimes for self-interested institutional and political legitimacy; and sometimes by force, when challenged to live up to claimed beneficence. The effort to trace the evolution of regionalism takes me into the messy, often nasty, world of politics – a realm that environmental history and history of the American West were for a long time slow to embrace (Johnston 1998). In the multi-state, sometimes even international, Columbia River-centered Pacific Northwest, political battles have long taken place at multiple jurisdictional levels and geographic scales. Although the existing institutional and political structure of the Columbia River’s region has remained, changing political tides over the decades since the New Deal have pushed the Columbia River-centered Pacific Northwest in different directions, and individual politicians and agency personnel have again and again been able to achieve distinct influence at particular moments. Thus, despite existing institutional structures of regional organization, every political contest has been distinct

and indeterminate – and then, in a “path-dependent” process, its results have restructured later contests (c.f. Skocpol 1992; Thelen and Steinmo 1992; Immergut 1998; Berk 1994). Nonetheless, there are some general rules to be found. The biggest and simplest one is that the survival of any ideals and practices of reorganizing space and decision-making, environment and society, on a regional basis, has required political compromise. Secondly, in large part because this regional federal agency has needed the continuing support or at least tolerance of its federal congressional delegation, people, places and interests left out of the regional conception have sometimes been able to force their way in to participation and benefits-sharing, or else to keep from being subsumed fully into the region – though not to change its central geography or priorities.

Recognizing the ongoing need for political compromise, my final broad goal is to appraise and analyze realistically the potential for regionally organized Columbia River management to provide wide social benefits to help sustain a high quality of life for a diverse and inclusive range of people, and to support natural hydrological and ecological processes, salmon, and viable livelihoods based on the river’s natural products. I hope too to suggest broader lessons for what may be possible for other regionalist efforts in other places launched in the past, present and future. When regional Columbia River management was put into practice, it had to function within broader political and economic geographies, and also to find a way to manage its region’s own internal geographical, jurisdictional and social fractures – hence the continual need for political compromise. These kinds of social and economic pressures have often been blamed for past failures of regionalist efforts to meet the needs of the poor and politically marginalized, to slow urbanization, and to conserve natural environments (see e.g. Selznick 1953; Grant 1978; Dorman 1993; Weaver 1984; Friedmann and Weaver 1979; Friedmann 1955; Chandler 1984; Creese 1990; Spann 1996). It is undeniable that such pressures have drastically weakened the ability of the Columbia River’s Pacific Northwest to, for example, restructure economic geographies to evenly spread out economic opportunity, support the livelihoods of farmers or agricultural workers rather than agribusiness, or manage the river to sustain ecological connections and fishers’ cultures, communities and livelihoods. On the other hand, the regional organization of

Columbia River management and politics has provided a greater capacity for regional coordination of the river system's ecological recovery than many other river basins have. Further, it has expanded, when pushed, to take in new participants, and to pursue new goals. The failure of regionalism in the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest, in other words, is not total. By analyzing the strengths and limits of Columbia River regionalism in the real world over the last seventy years, I hope to further the ability of this and other regionalist efforts to fulfill their own aims of providing participatory resource governance and wide social and environmental benefits.

OUTLINE AND METHODS

These goals are threads that run through the next six chapters. The chapters are in chronological order, largely non-overlapping in time frames, but they are not parallel in form or focus. Each focuses in different proportions on ideas, institutions, people, the physical river and its salmon, political contests, and environmental policy-making; and each also focuses at different resolutions of time and detail. The topic of the Columbia River-centered Pacific Northwest is so large, and connected to so much, that there was no way to provide full detail at every stage. Thus, in the chapters that follow, details about particular events, contests, fractures, constraints and processes of compromise in some stages have to serve as illustrations for broader and longer points and trends; longer expositions in one chapter make the relevance of later or earlier briefer echoes meaningful.

To write a broad seventy-year history, and to analyze the contested Columbia River management politics of both past and present, I have had to rely on a mix not only of narrative focuses but also of methods and sources. My work relies most heavily on archival sources, official policy-related documents, published and unpublished secondary sources (many written during the earlier eras covered in my historical narrative), informal and formal interviews, and my own experience working on Columbia River policy.¹¹ I

11. I interned for a total of about half a year at the Northwest Power Planning Council in 2000 and 2001 (see chapter 6). My understanding of Columbia River politics grew in large part out of this experience, and from the many conversations I was able to have with policy-makers from federal agencies, states and tribes. This essay, however, does

did not use a formal coding procedure but rather an iterative process of building a historical narrative piece by piece, noting missing information, and then returning to do more research using whatever method and sources were most likely to fill in the gaps. As much as possible I have also worked to triangulate information, so as pieces of data from individual archived letters, news stories or secondary accounts were shaped into broader narratives, they were verified with data and narratives from other sources.

Chapter Two (“Conception: The Pacific Northwest Regional Planning Commission crafts a region, 1933-5”) traces the initial conception of a Columbia River-centered Pacific Northwest. The chapter was built from original archival research on the Pacific Northwest Regional Planning Commission (PNWPRC), a four-state planning agency that operated from 1933-43. The chapter functions mainly to fulfill my second goal, historicizing the Pacific Northwest’s relationship to the Columbia River, and my fourth goal, appraising the possibilities for regional and regionalist natural resource management to meet diverse social and ecological needs. A large portion of the chapter details alternative Pacific Northwest geographies with which the PNWRPC grappled. This analysis dismantles decisively two very problematic assumptions about the Pacific Northwest and regions more generally: that the Pacific Northwest is a natural region; and that regions, because they develop naturally, necessarily encompass an inclusive range of people, environments and interconnections. After laying out six alternative Pacific Northwests, I detail the historically and geographically contingent process by which a seventh regional conception, of a three-and-a-half-state, Columbia River-centered Pacific Northwest, emerged as *the* regional definition.

The impetus and methods to select a particular regional definition came in large part from the national planning agency, itself influenced by regionalist thinking. But it was the PNWPRC that chose which pieces from the many and varied notions of regionalism should be shaped into a specific Pacific Northwest conception, and chose which connections across space should form the defining regional frame. As I describe how these choices were made, I achieve part of my third goal – to show why and how

not in any way represent the views of Council (now the Northwest Power and Conservation Council). I also volunteered and worked before that time for the Oregon Natural Resources Council, editing their report on the economics of the lower Snake River dams (Lansing and Vogel 1998).

regionalism was narrowed and came to favor certain interests over others. I show that developing a regional definition of the three-and-a-half-state, Columbia River-centered Pacific Northwest was in part a strategic move of a four-state political coalition to lay claim to the best economic opportunities of the day – federal construction of Columbia River dams and power lines. As a result, in the emergent definition, identity with the Columbia River was paired with ambitions for river development; social and environmental responsibility were inextricably linked with economic self-interest; and regional identity was tied to a strategic multi-state alliance to compete for federal dollars. These linked ideas and motives would prove to be legacies as long-lasting as the ties between the Columbia River and the Pacific Northwest.

Chapter Three (“Politics: From the Columbia River-centered Pacific Northwest to the Bonneville Project Act, 1936-7”) is a fine-grained exposition aimed at the third goal of finding how and why regionalism has narrowed or expanded, and dives into a detailed examination of the political conflicts and negotiations that shaped how the PNWRPC’s conception of a Columbia River-centered Pacific Northwest was hammered and narrowed into the 1937 law creating the federal power agency that would become the BPA. It is built from original archival research, as well as newspaper coverage and secondary analyses. While other writers have told important parts of the story of the development of what became the Bonneville Project Act, my research uncovered a broader context of regional and federal political machinations, including considerable hostility and volatility both in Washington DC and the Pacific Northwest. In the nation’s capital, the Columbia River-centered Pacific Northwest had to withstand numerous obstacles: presidential caution in the face of Supreme Court attacks on the TVA and the 1936 election; federal inter-departmental turf battles; and, by 1937, growing Congressional hostility to any notion of government reorganization. But the problem was not all in Washington D.C. In the Pacific Northwest, the ideal of a unified regional program that could bring wide and inclusive social benefit fractured into contested regional visions and policy prescriptions, as Portland sought to keep Bonneville Dam’s benefits for itself and Idaho and Montana set themselves in a defensive posture, worrying about retaining their right to control upriver waters, and to keep power prices high enough to subsidize irrigation. The

hostility to and volatility around plans for a regional Pacific Northwest agency explain the deep compromises that were ultimately written into legislation. The PNWRPC, its Washington D.C. parent national planning agency, FDR and the congressional delegations from Washington and Oregon shepherded the regional idea only into its partial institutionalization in a supposedly temporary, single-dam federal power agency with regional and some regionalist potential, with the 1937 Bonneville Project Act.

Every step of this story is historically specific, and shows the contingency and indeterminacy of how ideas and politics shape institutions and policy. Nonetheless, the detail here also reveals recurring political challenges – and they have remarkably close echoes in accounts of later efforts to create a Columbia Valley Authority (Ogden 1949; McKinley 1952; Voeltz 1960; Lang 2001), and in later Columbia River politics (see later chapters). This suggests any Pacific Northwest regionalist agency would have had to compromise into a shape not unlike the BPA.¹²

Chapter Four (“Institutionalization: The BPA Builds a Region, 1937-45”) tells the story of the formative years of the Columbia River’s Pacific Northwest. This was when the idea of the region crafted by the PNWRPC, and partially legislated into the 1937 Bonneville Project Act, was laid out on the physical landscape as transmission lines, and on the economic and political landscape as a shared regional economic advantage, the most inexpensive electric power in the country. The chapter is built mainly from secondary sources, both published and unpublished. It aims to fulfill my second and third goals, helping to further historicize the Columbia River’s Pacific Northwest and also to trace the political pressures, some relatively constant and some radically changing during these eight tumultuous years, which enabled or curtailed the pursuit of regionalist goals of wide social inclusion and environmental conservation.

This is perhaps the most ironic of the eras in the region’s history for at the same time the region became interconnected in a way it had never been – fulfilling the vision of the Columbia River’s Pacific Northwest far more than the PNWRPC could ever have done – it also had to abandon a large portion of its idealistic regionalist vision. This

12. There are also strong echoes in the history of the Tennessee Valley Authority after its inception – for example, it largely narrowed to a focus on electric power (Miller and Reidinger 1998 provide a nice overview).

regionalist vision was not abandoned entirely, though; in BPA rhetoric, policy and practice, geographical expansion was linked to and promoted with visions of wide social wellbeing and a continued bounteous river, cheap power rates and rapid rural electrification, and strong support for the growth of public and cooperative utilities. Additionally, the BPA supported protection of the scenic Columbia Gorge, and helped support and fund fish hatcheries and ladders. But there were political pressures that could not be denied. There was a mounting backlash against the New Deal. Local groups railed against policies defended in the name of regional good which seemed to violate their own future visions. Above all, there was the war, and the need to prove this federal agency and its power to be of value to the nation's military machine. And so as had the PNWRPC in developing its recommendations, and as had the policy-makers who had hammered out the Bonneville Project Act, so too the BPA itself had to compromise during its formative and most idealistic years. The common purpose that could win popular support and the critical unanimity of the Pacific Northwest Congressional delegation was to produce and sell prodigious amounts of power at the cheapest rates in the nation, and to position the region and its river as resources for national-scale defense and industry.

Chapter Five ("Evolution: The Intervening Years 1945-80) is a short interlude chapter, summarizing and offering a brief analysis of the changes in the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest between the end of World War II and the passage of the Northwest Power Act in 1980. It is built largely from a few seminal secondary sources, and, like Chapter Four, addresses my second and third goals of historicizing the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest and analyzing the process by which regionalism was sometimes narrowed, other times expanded. It begins with an overview of those aspects of the geography and structure of the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest that have endured since the end of the Second World War – still centered on BPA-provided Columbia River hydropower, now from a system of some 31 dams – and an overview of the region's tangible changes, including large increases in population and urbanization and profound alterations of the river's hydrology and ecology. It then reviews three major challenges that have reshaped the region in its geography, and in its range of participants

and interests. Through these challenges, that BPA-centered Columbia River management has in fits and spurts sometimes been kept in check, and sometimes expanded to serve wider interests, moving closer to the New Deal regionalist ideal. The culmination was the 1980 Northwest Power Act, which brought the BPA greater authority, but made it accountable to states, tribes, energy conservation goals, and fish and wildlife concerns. It marked a moment in which many invested great hopes in renewed regionalist visions for the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest.

Chapter Six ("Unraveling? Coordinating or Divvying up the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest) returns to the present to address my first goal, uncovering the regional structures and assumptions behind the practice, fractures and politics of the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest today. It is built on my own considerable experience working on salmon policy, diverse news reports, policy documents, and about forty informal and formal interviews with policymakers, former and current employees of federal, state and tribal agencies, and interest group leaders.

The public face of regionalism – or the limits to regionalism – in the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest today is the effort to protect and restore the river's once prolific salmon. Less visible but at least as comprehensive is the regional coordination of electric power planning, generation, conservation, and distribution. Regionalism in both these aspects is understood today primarily as wide participation and system-wide thinking; the latter means consideration of diverse and dispersed needs and their interconnections, as well as planning for the long term. More than a quarter century after the launch of the four-state Pacific Northwest Electric Power Planning and Conservation Council with the Northwest Power Act, there is far less enthusiasm and faith that regional organization and participation through the Council can achieve these ends. The chapter provides a historical overview and analysis of the development of the Council's Fish and Wildlife Program, which is funded by hundreds of millions of BPA dollars per year. Since 2000 the Council has undertaken an ambitious effort to develop and integrate some sixty "subbasin" plans, each informed by current scientific understandings of rivers as dynamic and connected fluvial and ecological systems. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the Council's fish and wildlife program has been riddled with problems very reminiscent of

the PNWRPC's: an unmanageable volume of data, an avoidance of controversy, and a politics of participation that tends toward pork barrel funding of projects. Conflicts among the states and tribes of the basin over fish and wildlife management have been exacerbated by ongoing Endangered Species Act (ESA) litigation. Despite salmon advocates' hopes, the ESA has not enforced a system-wide approach nor a more detached national-scale political constituency. The likely answer to the salmon advocates' dilemmas described in Chapter One is that to achieve major changes to dams on the river, they will have to work within rather than against the regional politics of BPA-centered Columbia River management. The irony is that the very foundation of the regional system may be unraveling. Utilities in the region are in a multi-year "regional dialogue" to divvy up the federal Columbia River power among them; and the accord between private and public utilities built into the Northwest Power Act is unraveling. The BPA and its region have not dissipated entirely yet, but that is the gradual direction.

Chapter Seven ("Conclusion: Historic and Future Possibilities for Regionalism in the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest and Beyond") draws lessons from seven decades of regional organization of place and environment in the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest. This final closing chapter builds on the rest of the dissertation, and a small but invaluable analytical literature on the history and practice of regional planning and governance. It addresses my final goal, to appraise the potential for regionally organized Columbia River management to provide for both a diverse and inclusive range of people, and to support natural hydrological and ecological processes, and the river's flagship species, its salmon. I argue that the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest, like many regional and regionalist efforts around the world, was conceived in part as a way to avoid political conflicts, and evolution through political challenge has pushed the region to include powerful interests that might otherwise be opponents. This has had a very mixed effect in terms of regionalist goals. On the one hand, it has forced broader inclusion in many ways and cases. On the other hand, it has made fundamental geographical reorganization or a major overturning of resource distribution difficult. The tremendous economic resources of federal Columbia River hydropower and BPA money have motivated considerable collaboration, and reasonable generosity toward others

(especially when their support is needed for institutional survival); and decades of regional coordination have supported broader coordination on new issues and interests. In the end, the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest must be credited with having enabled considerable achievement of regionalist goals – surely not what its greatest enthusiasts hoped or now hope again, but perhaps about as much as realistically possible.

CHAPTER II

CONCEPTION: CRAFTING THE COLUMBIA RIVER'S PACIFIC NORTHWEST, 1933-35

INTRODUCTION

If Columbia River management represents a long-term case study in regional river system governance and management, then in order to understand it well, the first thing to do is to find how it began, where it came from, and what it meant at its inception. When and how did Columbia River management and the Columbia River itself come to be conceived as a regional endeavor, a regional resource and responsibility? More specifically: how did this large river basin – rather than smaller or larger or just different geographical groupings such as individual Columbia River tributaries or the full range of salmon-bearing rivers and oceanic waters in the North Pacific – come to be conceived and organized as a single system, to be managed by and for the people of the states of Washington, Oregon, Idaho and western Montana? How did this geographical grouping of river basin and of region, and their linkage, get to be so imbued with a sense of moral purpose, as the *right* organization of environment and place (and the right geographic scale - see Vogel 2008a)? And how did these ideas get to be centered in politics and policy practice on a single government agency, the Bonneville Power Administration, and a single river benefit, electric power?

This chapter uncovers the origins of regional Columbia River management – or more specifically, the *idea* of regional Columbia River management, and an associated idea of the Pacific Northwest as the Columbia River's region. It turns out that the idea came first, before the BPA, and before the narrow focus on electric power as the most

fundamental and most regional of Columbia River benefits. The idea of the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest preceded both the Columbia River's actual management as a unified river system, and the functional unification of its supposed region, a Pacific Northwest of Washington, Oregon, Idaho and western Montana.

A host of geographers in the last several decades have pointed out that conceptions of place and organizations of territory are linked to ideologies and social power relationships. They are in other words, *political* institutions. And their power is greater when they are naturalized – that is, when they are assumed to be natural (e.g. Taylor 1985, 1994, 1996; Smith 1993; Massey 1993, 1994, 1995; Jess and Massey 1995; Agnew 1994; Agnew and Corbridge 1995; Delaney and Leitner 1997; Swyngedouw 1997a, 1997b; Jones 1998; Marston 2000; Brown and Purcell 2005), as is too often the case for the Columbia River's region. To de-naturalize a place or territory, to reveal it as a social choice and political institution with real social, political and economic power, one of the best approaches is to examine the process of its creation. This fits, too, with the principles and methods of historical institutionalism, which emphasizes that the characteristics of lasting government agencies and public policies derive from historically and geographically specific forces, pressures and structures and that they must therefore be historicized (overviews are provided in Skocpol 1992; Thelen and Steinmo 1992; Immergut 1998). By going back to the moment in which this region-river bond was conceived, we should be able to see all of its contents much more clearly: its structures and ideals, assumptions and priorities, and its founding political, social and environmental relationships.

Others have already de-romanticized the relationship between the Columbia River and the Pacific Northwest region, and problematized both the Pacific Northwest as a region and the Columbia River as an object of study and a bearer of meaning (e.g. Robbins, Frank, and Ross 1983; Robbins 2001; Egan 1990; Lang 1992, 2000; White 1995; Dietrich 1995; Schwantes 1996; Harden 1996; Lichatowich 1999). What has not been fully explored is the origin or the nature of the specific bond between the Columbia River and its particular Pacific Northwest region that I saw so clearly manifested in

recent Columbia River management and policy deliberations (see Chapter 1).¹ This chapter fills in that gap, historicizing the origins of the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest, and in the process helping to reveal its embedded content. The chapter is built from a detailed combing of the archives of the agency that in late 1935 crafted the conception of the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest, the Pacific Northwest Regional Planning Commission (PNWRPC),² a four-state planning agency that was also a regional office of FDR's national planning agency.³ I also leaned heavily on existing secondary histories of the regionalist "movement" of the 1920s-1930s (especially Friedmann and Weaver 1979; Weaver 1984; Dorman 1993; Spann 1996 - see also Meinig 2004) and tapped several histories and historical geographies of the Columbia River, the Pacific Northwest, and the BPA (especially BPA 1980; McKinley 1952; Meinig 1972, 1998; Schwantes 1996; White 1995; Tollefson 1987).

The major part of my story occurs *before* the PNWRPC developed its regional definition. I set the stage before the New Deal, when the area that would come to be considered the Pacific Northwest was fractured and fragmented – in contrast to the ideals of a "regionalist" intellectual movement that saw regions as organically developing areas which, if nurtured, could support strong community, provide both urban and rural areas with a high quality of life, and further environmental conservation. Reflecting the realities of the Pacific Northwest, the PNWRPC came together starting in September 1933 for far less lofty reasons: it was a strategic alliance of four states to improve access

1. Richard White (1995) provides core nuggets, but has left a fuller exposition untold. White's core nuggets that I cover in this dissertation include a discussion of Lewis Mumford's ideas and their influence on ideas for Pacific Northwest development; the significant role of the PNWRPC; the central importance of the BPA in making the Pacific Northwest a region; and the ways that regional leaders and regional interests (not alienated federal technocrats, as suggested by others) drove Columbia River development – precisely to gain regional political and economic autonomy relative to the East and the nation. White himself recognizes he has left part of the story untold. Notably, he suggests that a critical history of the BPA has yet to be written.

2. This national planning agency had four names during its brief but influential ten-year existence. In this chapter I have used the three names it used between 1933 and 1935, the National Planning Board (1933-4), the National Resources Board (1934-5) and the National Resources Committee (1935-9). Its archives, however, are categorized under its final name, the National Resources Planning Board; and the works written about it also generally use that name (Warren 1969; Clawson 1981; Reagan 1999)

3. I used mainly the PNWRPC archives at the National Archives and Records Administration, Pacific Alaska Region, in Seattle; but also tapped the PNWRPC files at the Oregon Historical Society in Portland, and at the Oregon State Archives in Salem. I also relied on PNWRPC documents available in the Oregon Collection in the University of Oregon library and at the Portland State University Library.

to federal public works dollars. I then trace forward the agency's own developing notion of its region.

In the months between fall 1933 and fall 1935, the PNWRPC grappled or interacted with six alternative Pacific Northwest regionalizations. I detail each of these, and analyze what and whom each would have included and prioritized, based on both its territory and what and whom it was organized around. This exposition achieves two purposes. First, it dismantles the easy assumptions that the Columbia River is a natural, timeless regional connector, and that the region it reaches is an inherent regional unit. It shows instead that the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest was a choice with significant social and political implications. Second, it demonstrates that there was *no* inherently more natural or more inclusive Pacific Northwest. Side by side the alternative Pacific Northwest regionalizations reveal that each divided as much as it included, and fixing any one as the Pacific Northwest would have had an enormous effect on whom and what would be included and prioritized in regional practice. The story of the alternative Pacific Northwest regionalizations thus helps both to historicize the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest, and to reveal the fundamental limits of any regional conception to be as socially and environmentally inclusive as we like to imagine.

The PNWRPC was compelled to come up with its own seventh regionalization, which I call the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest, in a defensive response to two of the alternatives – the two that were the most potentially threatening, because they were advanced by its parent agency, the national planning agency. The PNWRPC's state representatives were motivated by a desire to hold together their working coalition of political and business leaders to win federal investment dollars in river development; the PNWRPC leadership sought to protect its own institutional turf. But in the process of developing a response to FDR's national planners that would be accepted as legitimate, the PNWRPC also absorbed many of the visions and methods of the regionalists. In the PNWRPC's resulting regional definition, the goals of regional coordination were to promote Columbia River development, but also to foster civic participation, spread the benefits of river development among widely dispersed and different communities, and to retain critical natural values of the river as well. Ideals of social inclusion would include

urban and rural areas, but not a major economic planning effort; conservation of the river would incorporate fish ladders, hatcheries and the protection of scenic areas, but would be most centrally advanced through the construction of multi-purpose dams whose economic benefits would be spread out throughout the river's Pacific Northwest. Our notions of what the Columbia River's relationship to its region *should* be are inheritances from the regionalist portion of this definition. Regional practice has come from that portion, but from the rest of the definition as well.

BEFORE 1933: REGIONAL FRAGMENTATION; IDEAS & IDEALS OF REGIONS

Pacific Northwest Regional Fragmentation

In the 1920s and the early 1930s, before the New Deal began, there was a loose conception of the Pacific Northwest region. The Pacific Northwest was understood to be located in the northwestern corner of the U.S., perhaps extending into Canada, maybe even to the territory of Alaska. In the cities of Portland, Seattle, Spokane and Vancouver, BC, there was a sense of areas to the east and north as vast hinterlands. But the boundaries of any "Pacific Northwest" were vague and its character rather over-generalized as a still-frontier region of forests and loggers. The specific area which would soon become clearly identified as the Pacific Northwest, the area consisting of Washington, Oregon, Idaho and western Montana, was not really a "region" in any deep sense. Diverse and divided in its natural geography between western rainy forests, central plains and deserts, and distant Rocky Mountains, it was also fractured socially. Labor battles, especially in the long-dominant logging and mining industries, were endemic and sometimes violent. The larger cities of Portland, Seattle, Tacoma and Spokane fought to dominate their partially overlapping turfs. While these cities competed for rural products and markets, rural farmers and residents in the four states in the northwest corner of the U.S. languished in the face of depressed agricultural prices and the slow acquisition of basic modern amenities like electricity. Distance travel was still mainly by train, and so most of Idaho and Montana seemed far away from Portland and Puget Sound (Neuberger 1938; Meinig 1972, 1998; Schwantes 1996).

Through much – though not all – of this environmentally diverse and socially fractured area ran the great Columbia River system. Once, portions of the Columbia River and several of its main tributaries had formed the core travel and trade routes in much of this corner of the world. But beginning in the late 1800s railroads had displaced the river system as the central avenues of travel and trade. While the Northern Pacific Railroad still followed the Columbia River to Portland, railroad access to the top-notch Puget Sound ocean ports of Seattle and Tacoma had clearly become more important than the river in routing trade. This was reflected in the fact that Seattle had by 1910 surpassed Portland in population (Pomeroy 1965; Johansen and Gates 1967; Meinig 1972, 1998; Abbott 1992; Schwantes 1996, 2000).

Nor was the Columbia River in the first third of the twentieth century able to connect the disparate human communities that ranged and battled in and near different parts of its large basin into any kind of unified region through its natural ecological or hydrological connections. Running from the edge of the Canadian Rockies to the Pacific Ocean, the Columbia River still followed much the same course it had taken for millennia. Its watershed was large, its water volume enormous, and its run steep; this supported cold, well-oxygenated water good for aquatic species, a dynamic hydrology and geomorphology which made and remade myriad diverse habitats, and a capacity for high populations of fish, including the river's prodigious salmon, historically the most productive in the world (Lichatowich 1999; Committee on Protection and Management of Pacific Northwest Anadromous Salmonids 1996; Williams 2006; Netboy 1980). But leaders of human communities did not seem to appreciate, understand, or care for natural river processes and functions – and their activities were slowly unraveling many of them. Many people throughout the basin used the river's waters or biota – or hoped that with river development they could. But most of these people were focused on only their local part of the river, and the gains they could secure there. People fished for salmon in the lower river where many streams' fish could be caught at once, in order to supply canneries, regardless of the effect on upstream fishers (Taylor 1999; Dietrich 1995).⁴

4. This had decimated salmon runs by the turn of the twentieth century, and only through new Oregon-Washington bi-state regulations beginning in 1908 were the worst of these losses brought under control (Taylor 1999)

Farmers who had settled in many of the river system's valleys drained wetlands, channelized many of the river's tributaries, and built small irrigation dams to improve their local agriculture. Together with ranching and past beaver trapping, these activities had so reduced upriver habitat (Volkman 1997; Taylor 1999; Lichatowich 1999; Williams 2006) that Oregon's fisheries commissioner in 1930 estimated that half of the Columbia River basin's salmon spawning habitat was gone (Taylor 1999). The Bureau of Reclamation had begun to build dams on the Snake and Yakima Rivers in southern Idaho and central Washington soon after the Reclamation Act was passed in 1902 – affecting hydrology and ecology in the larger Columbia Basin (Fiege 1999; Dana 1959; Pisani 2002; ISG 2000). And, portending what was to come, in the early 1930s, the first dam to go on the mainstem Columbia was being built – a power dam in eastern Washington on the mid-Columbia, built by a private electric utility. This would interrupt the flow of water and fish on the main river to an extent not previously seen (Holbrook 1965; Johansen and Gates 1957).

Ironically, it was precisely the advent of mainstem dams which, at the very end of the 1920s and beginning of the 1930s, was fostering a common interest among policy-makers from the four states which shared the largest volume of the Columbia River's waters. The Army Corps of Engineers was preparing a plan for basin-wide Columbia River development (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers 1933-4). While such a plan would, of course, imply major disruption of river processes, it required a focus on river system interconnections. But the engineers' plan had yet to be tied to a larger vision of the Pacific Northwest region.

The Ideas and Ideals of Regional Geography, Regionalism and Regional Planning

The fractured character of the human society and the lack of attention to social and ecological connections across the Columbia River basin contrasted sharply with idealized notions of regions promoted in other parts of the United States. A fragmented, largely intellectual, regionalist "movement" believed regions were subnational areas of moderate size rooted in shared environments, economies and cultures. Regions, it was argued, grew up naturally and provided a caring society of interconnected human

communities, unique cultures, and well-tended environmental resources. They supported and were made up of small urban and lively rural communities working complementarily to mutual benefit (Dick 1973, 1989; Dorman 1993; Weaver 1984; Friedmann and Weaver 1979; Meinig 2004).

Variations on regionalist movements have sprung up in myriad times and places, but each has arisen in a specific historical and geographical context. The regionalist movement of the 1920s and early 1930s grew up in a time when industrial capitalism had come to dominate the United States economy as well as people's daily lives. Industrial cities, concentrated mainly in the Northeast and Midwest, were crowded and dirty. Conditions in rural areas exacerbated the problem. During World War I, agricultural production had boomed in response to a war-based surge in demand. Afterwards, in the 1920s, rural areas faced persistent agricultural oversupply and resulting low prices. The result was large-scale migration of rural residents to already-crowded cities, where they often lived in ramshackle housing and worked in terrible conditions. While the roaring twenties brought prosperity, the decade also brought social conflict and anxiety. As people in the Northeast worked to retain prosperity while improving conditions, people in the less-urbanized South and West looked on with both hope and concern as industry began to expand and migrate out toward them. Anxiety about these changes was amplified by a grim awareness of what was happening in Europe. There, social stresses and dislocations brought by similar processes of industrial capitalism had led to fascism and communism (NRC 1935; Weaver 1984; Friedmann and Weaver 1979; Dorman 1993; Meinig 2004).

In this context, regions were offered up as the alternatives to the strife-torn and degraded society and environment of proliferating industrial cities and declining rural areas. Regionalists argued that regions grown out of natural allegiances of place, in a healthy, spacious America, could overcome the ills of the urban Northeast and would not spawn the kind of social rebellion that had taken such dark turns in Europe. In regions, people could feel connected with the land and with each other; and through these connections could continue to build an active, conscientious, healthy democracy (NRC

1935; Link 1959; Weaver 1984; Friedmann and Weaver 1979; Dorman 1993; Meinig 2004).

Within this general vision, several groups of regionalist thinkers mixed in varying specifics. In the Northeast, a group of intellectuals, mostly planners and architects, called themselves the Regional Planning Association of America (RPAA), and included luminaries Lewis Mumford, Stuart Chase and Benton MacKaye. This group saw regions as areas that naturally grew up through linked trade and travel, often following rivers. In regions, they argued, urban, rural and wilderness portions were complementary and mutually sustaining. The RPAA focused on the need for rationally, scientifically planned communities and regional landscapes that dispersed population and industry, and also intermingled population and industry with agriculture and parks. RPAA members had high hopes that technology would enable a shift to regional economies and society. In particular, the advent of long distance electric power transmission meant industry could be dispersed wherever transmission lines were built, distributing opportunity evenly across a region. Cars and highways, too, could enable decentralization, reducing urban crowding while bringing livelihoods to rural areas, and enabling even city-dwellers to access rejuvenating wilderness (Spann 1996; Sussman 1976; Friedmann and Weaver 1979).

In the South, two groups of regionalists focused more on regions as bearers of important cultural values threatened by an expanding industrial economy and national-scale homogenization. In contrast to the RPAA, and reflecting their Southern perspectives, they saw regions as products of mostly social forces: social and cultural history, common agricultural production, shared political identity. One group of literary intellectuals based mainly at Vanderbilt University in Nashville called themselves “Agrarians” and “sectionalists” rather than regionalists, and offered a kind of Southern nationalism, extolling the virtues of the traditional South against the infiltration of Northern government and industry. Suspicious of both the federal government and large corporations, both of which they saw as tied mainly to Northern interests, the Agrarians supported the decentralization of government to regions, and efforts to limit the power of corporations and to protect the property holdings of small farmers (Conkin 2001;

Bingham and Underwood 2001; Havard and Sullivan 1982; Agar and Tate 1936; Twelve Southerners 1951; Biles 1994; Davidson 1938).

Intellectually and politically situated between the RPAA and the Agrarians were the Southern Regionalists, led by sociologist Howard Odum of the University of North Carolina. Odum and his followers sought to find and support unique Southern regional culture and economies, while challenging the South's longstanding inequalities of racism and geographic divides. Odum's was a difficult course, for while he sought to challenge oppressive economic and social institutions, he could afford to alienate neither his Southern neighbors nor the mostly Northern and corporate-funded foundations which supported much of his work. His careful compromise was to advocate for new educational and other opportunities to be created and dispersed throughout the South. He supported this cautious advocacy with academic thoroughness: he drew on methods of regional geography, delineating the South, its subregions and other regions as well through a detailed mapping and analysis of multitudinous environmental and social features (Tullos 1990; Jensen 1951; Odum and Moore 1938; Friedmann and Weaver 1979).

The different conceptions and policy prescriptions of these three groups suggest an essential problem with regionalism: the romantic ideal of harmoniously balanced, integrated, democratic regions takes on very different forms when different people begin to hammer out the specifics of their vision and how they think it should be achieved – and this makes it rather difficult even for true believers to find common ground in building real policy prescriptions (Graham 1976 makes a similar point about planning in general).

There was another problem with regionalism: it was tied – especially in Odum's work – to a premise from regional geography that regions were real units, that could actually be delineated on a map. The problem was, when even the best trained geographers and sociologists used multiple data sets to delineate regions, there were never clear results (Hall 1935; Finch 1939; Hartshorne 1939).

Still, any and all of these three schools of regionalism, and certainly the gist of regionalist ideas which filtered westward, suggested that coherence, integration and

identity as a region might offer the Pacific Northwest incredibly valuable benefit. But how could would-be regionalism mesh with the reality of disconnected places, political battles, and seeming indifference to environmental connections?

Quite a few of the regionalists' specific goals and visions resonated with those of civic, business and political leaders in Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Montana. All four states had large rural expanses, and much of this area was poor and isolated, so many civic leaders were enthusiastic about a vision of thriving rural areas, and many legislators in state capitals were ready to line up behind the goal of dispersed industry. Urban leaders hoped that their relatively young cities could develop without the kind of urban crowding, slums and social strife they saw manifested in the Northeast. Many hoped planning could further economic development; some hoped it could protect scenic areas and conserve natural resources at the same time. And in the new age of long-distance transmission, it did not go unnoticed that the Columbia River system had unmatched hydropower potential. Columbia River hydropower development could be the key, perhaps, to all of these objectives: industry and opportunity in rural areas, clean and well-balanced cities, and resource conservation (Dick 1973, 1989; Dana, *The Columbia River - a National Opportunity*, December 1, 1930, NRPB Records; Lockley and Dana 1934; *Power--Key to General Plan for the Pacific Northwest*, July 31, 1934, NRPB Records).

If one followed the line of reasoning put forth by the RPAA, the Agrarians, or the Southern Regionalists, though, the Pacific Northwest would be able to achieve these goals best by finding itself first. The Pacific Northwest needed somehow, perhaps, to find its inner region – its natural interconnectedness and interdependencies; its unique cultural, social and environmental heritages. Following Odum's Southern Regionalists and the regional geographers whose methods they borrowed, part of this task might entail delineating the region through a process of mapping and analysis of many social and environmental factors. But who would do this work, and what would bring the area together into a coherent, more self-conscious unit? True regions, said the experts, were not to be created, but rather grown, endogenously, organically (Unstead 1916; Hartshorne 1939); so somehow, it seemed self-evident, motivation and coordination must come from within.

If there was a role for out-of-region forces and powers, it would be to support the Pacific Northwest (however defined) in finding and furthering its own commonalities and connections. People, businesses and governments from other places and larger scales might offer, for example, funding, technology, infrastructure, and education. Otherwise, the most important thing they could offer would probably be non-interference: the federal government might, for example, following the Agrarians' suggestions, provide for regional political authority and autonomy.

What happened over the next few years belied, at the same time it tapped, regionalist theory. The very idea of regionalism would come to the Pacific Northwest largely from the federal, that is, national-scale, government; and it would take federal government intervention and leadership to conceptualize, motivate and institutionalize a clear region in the Pacific Northwest. The regional coordination that grew up within the future Pacific Northwest was far more a political strategy to win federal dollars than it was an endemic regionalist vision. The shape, content and future of the Pacific Northwest as a region – and with it, of the Columbia River system, for the Columbia River would be construed as the region's heart – would be built in large part by the *importation* of regionalist ideas and institutions from the very geographic scale often seen as the antithesis of the region, the scale which some said threatened regions and with them, the vibrancy of American life and democracy: the nation. More specifically, regionalism would come to the Pacific Northwest by way of Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal.

TOWARD A PACIFIC NORTHWEST REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

On September 17, 1933, representatives from the states of Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Montana and from the new federal Public Works Administration, traveled together by train to Pendleton, Oregon, and talked about regional planning (Conference on regional plan aboard Union Pacific train, Meeting Notes, September 17, 1933, NRPB Records). This train conversation marks the moment in which interest in Columbia River development catalyzed region-wide discussions and helped launch a three-and-a-half-

state regional planning organization that would shape the future of both the Pacific Northwest and the Columbia River.

The eleven men were on their way to a hearing that would be held the next day on a proposal to build a dam at Umatilla Rapids on the Columbia River, below the Columbia's confluence with its largest tributary, the Snake. It is no coincidence that a Umatilla Rapids discussion was part of the impetus for a regional organization that would come to shape the Columbia River's future. In the preceding years and even decades, most interest in the Columbia River had been local. The closest thing to regional mobilization or organization in relation to the Columbia had been the repeated alliance between farmers and merchants of the "Inland Empire" in southeastern Washington, northeastern Oregon, and the adjacent area of northern Idaho, on the one hand, and the more politically and economically powerful business and civic leaders of Portland, Oregon on the other. Together, this alliance had successfully pushed for navigation canals in the Cascades of the Columbia and Celilo Falls, both in the lower Columbia. The rapids at Umatilla were the next major obstacle preventing the Inland Empire's long dream of river-borne shipping from the mouth of the Columbia River at Astoria all the way up the lower Columbia River, on through the lower Snake River, to Lewiston, Idaho. So the meeting about Umatilla Rapids, like the canal efforts before it, brought in people and interests from all along this route (Petersen 1995).

The Inland Empire advocates of 1933 were, like their predecessors, savvy and ambitious. A series of hard-working organizers had been coordinating area residents and merchants in some form for some fifty years; this had been the key to their success in allying with Portland leaders to get the two lower river canals built (Petersen 1995). Now, they aimed to broaden their base even more. Calling themselves the Tri-State Development League, they hoped to make Columbia-Snake navigation a three-state-wide issue and goal (A. P. Dodd, Creation and first meeting of Tri-State Development League, August 9, 1933, NRPB Records). And so, in addition to the many groups interested in Columbia River ports and shipping, they invited representatives from new state advisory boards that had been set up in Oregon, Washington and Idaho, as well as the Regional Advisor of the new federal Public Works Administration.

The context was, of course, the New Deal, and a host of opportunities and institutions that it had already wrought or was poised to create. To the Inland Empire navigation activists, the important opportunities centered around new initiatives for dams and related public works projects on the Columbia River (A. P. Dodd, Creation and first meeting of Tri-State Development League, August 9, 1933, NRPB Records). The new President Roosevelt and an enthusiastically supportive Congress had recently authorized spending for two new major dams on the Columbia River. Bonneville would be in the lower river, some forty miles east of Portland, and Grand Coulee would be in the upper-middle river, in central-eastern Washington, about ninety miles west of Spokane. In addition, Roosevelt and Congress had authorized funding for a new dam in Montana, in the upper Missouri Basin, Fort Peck Dam. Besides the three dams approved in Washington, Oregon and Montana, the federal government had approved a river basin-wide development plan in the Tennessee Valley. Already there was bubbling interest that something similar might be created in the Columbia Valley. More immediately than these grand possibilities, the new Public Works Administration (PWA) – the agency whose participation the Tri-State Development League now sought – had made funds available to states for public works projects. All of this seemed to signal the new Roosevelt administration's willingness to consider projects precisely like the one the Tri-State Development League proposed at Umatilla Rapids.

As the League saw it, the next step was to lobby the administration to make the Umatilla Dam one of its priorities (Tri-State Development League, Formal Application to Ickes, Construction of Umatilla Rapids Dam, August 16, 1933, NRPB Records; A. P. Dodd, Creation and first meeting of Tri-State Development League, August 9, 1933, NRPB Records). This is where the state advisory boards of Idaho, Oregon and Washington and the regional advisor of the PWA came in. Within the PWA, a new National Planning Board was helping states to create state planning bodies. The PWA proposed to look to these state planning bodies for help in prioritizing its projects (NRB1934; PNWRPC, Regional and State Advisory Technical Committees and Divisional Committees, preliminary paper, 1934, NRPB Records). To the Tri-State Development League, the state advisory boards of Washington, Idaho and Oregon were,

then, new, close-at-hand avenues to influence federal funding priorities. Even more hopeful, the PWA had named one of the main longtime Portland-based leaders of the Columbia-Snake navigation effort, Marshall Dana, to be its regional advisor. By inviting the three states' advisory boards and Dana to their meeting the leaders of the Tri-State Development League hoped to have quick and direct influence on PWA funding.

But while the Tri-State Development League strategized to use the new PWA and state advisory boards to push for funding of its proposed Umatilla Rapids dam, it had already inadvertently catalyzed the beginnings of more wide-ranging discussion about public works that would put approval of its dam on the back burner for another decade (construction of what would become the McNary Dam would not begin until another decade after that). A month and a half earlier, in early August, the League had submitted a written proposal for a Umatilla Rapids dam to the PWA (Tri-State Development Commission, Formal Application to Ickes, August 1, 1933, NRPB Records). Regional PWA advisor Marshall Dana had written to PWA Administrator (and Interior Secretary) Harold Ickes asking how the proposal should be handled. Usually, Dana wrote, he consulted with the individual states in which the proposed project was located, but this was a project which involved three states. Should he submit the project directly to Ickes? Or should he unite the three boards in a discussion of the project (Dana to Ickes, August 11, 1933, NRPB Records)?

Dana's question was a simple administrative question about a single project. A clear direction – and the incentive – for regional coordination came in the response from his Washington D.C. superiors. About a week later, the head of the PWA's National Planning Board, Charles Eliot, wrote Dana. Eliot noted that Dana's district consisted of Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Montana, and that this district coincided fairly closely with the Columbia Basin. Considering this near congruence, and the fact that there was considerable interest in Columbia River development, what about putting together a regional plan, something like what was being done in the Tennessee Valley (Eliot to Dana, August 24, 1933, NRPB Records)?

Dana wrote saying he was not sure what this might look like, though he hoped it might include large-scale and long-term projects like Columbia River development, and

not just the many small unconnected projects which had already been proposed by myriad local governments throughout his four-state “region” (Dana to Charles W. Eliot, August 29, 1933, NRPB Records). By early September, he had clearly been encouraged – and he had an incentive with which to motivate others to participate in “regional planning.” He wrote to leading citizens from all four of his district’s states, asking if they might like to put together a comprehensive four-state plan that could help prioritize projects (Dana to citizens in Oregon, Washington, Idaho and Montana, September 8, 1933, NRPB Records). C. A. McClure, the president of the Northwest Association of Planning Commissions, which included planning commissions in Washington, Oregon and British Columbia (McClure 1936), followed this up with an invitation to his association’s many members, mostly city planning organizations, to a Northwest planning conference, to be held the following March (McClure to PNWRPC members, September 11, 1933, NRPB Records). Both Dana and McClure wrote in these widely distributed letters that comprehensive planning was a requirement under the PWA and that projects which were part of a comprehensive regional plan would have higher likelihood of approval (McClure to PNWRPC members, September 11, 1933, NRPB Records; Dana to citizens in Oregon, Washington, Idaho and Montana, September 8, 1933, NRPB Records). Higher likelihood of PWA funding were strong incentives for coordination indeed.

And so it was that when Dana, his assistant Roy Bessey, and nine newly designated state planners – from not only Idaho, Washington and Oregon, but the fourth state in Dana’s district as well, Montana – met on board the train on their way to the Tri-State Development League’s Umatilla Rapids meeting, there was lively interest from the participants. Their conversation ranged much more widely than the Umatilla Rapids Dam. They brainstormed about how to put together a comprehensive regional plan (Conference on regional plan aboard Union Pacific train, Meeting Notes, September 17, 1933, NRPB Records).

But their sense of their “region” was rudimentary and administrative, consisting simply of the four states of Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Montana. They had no clear sense of particular regional identity, nor of a united regional focus or theme. Certainly

they recognized the importance of the dams which would soon be built, as well as other, as yet only hoped-for, river developments. But river development ideas were considered among a laundry list of possibilities – from duty-free ports, to general transportation, to “the effects of racial stocks on planning considerations.” They raised basic concerns they could not yet answer. How could they build a regional plan which would focus on issues with large-scale influence, rather than lots of little projects? Could they do this, but manage to avoid interfering with the autonomy of individual states and other jurisdictions? Would there be money for the realization of the plan (Conference on regional plan aboard Union Pacific train, Meeting Notes, September 17, 1933, NRPB Records)?

It was no fault of their own that their ideas were vague. The vagueness reflected the way the ideas of regionalism had filtered down to them from the Roosevelt administration. Though regionalist thinkers saw in the FDR administration a great opportunity to influence policy (and indeed the New Deal did prove to be the time of regionalists’ greatest direct influence on federal policy), the administration incorporated regionalist ideas only selectively. The initiative for regional planning in the new administration came as much as anyone from Roosevelt himself – but like many of Roosevelt’s initiatives, New Deal regional planning had rather vague and mixed goals and premises. The president was less concerned about the concept or coherence of regions per se as he was about economic opportunity in rural areas, and about efficient use of resources for economic development. He identified planning as a way to study resources and opportunities in some detail and to build from these efficient programs of land use, conservation, infrastructure development, and industrial decentralization. If planning was to be “regional,” in Roosevelt’s view that meant mainly that it was supposed to look at varying and interrelated resources and needs, and to consider rural as well as urban areas. Both the president and the PWA’s new National Planning Board were familiar with regionalist ideas of the RPAA, the Agrarians and the Southern regionalists. But neither the president nor the city planners of the National Planning Board had incorporated anything more than a rather generalized, flexible notion of regions and regional planning (Reagan 1999; Hughes 1989; Dorman 1993; Graham 1976;

Clawson 1981; Greer 1958). This was reflected in the National Planning Board's rather open-ended directive to the PWA's District V Regional Advisor, Marshall Dana, and thus, in the approach to regional planning with which Dana and his assistant, Roy Bessey, directed their group.

There *was* one new New Deal initiative that suggested some guidance for New Deal regional planning, and the National Planning Board's Eliot had already suggested Dana consider it. This was the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), in many ways the poster child of the whole New Deal. It was also the object of great hope for regionalists, for it aimed – at least so many said – to look at a river basin in its entirety: waters, forests, soils, economy and social opportunity; and to develop the basin so as to benefit and sustain all of these (Hughes 1989; Creese 1990; Hargrove 1994; Chandler 1984; Conkin 1983; Draper 1933; Morgan 1933). The possibility of river basins as areas for integrative planning had suddenly become a familiar idea to the whole country – including to Marshall Dana and the new state planners of Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Montana. Still, even though there was some clarity that regional planning might be “integrated” planning incorporating a whole river basin, there were still more unknowns than knowns, even in the Tennessee Valley. What would be the specific objectives and priorities for TVA regional planning? Who would manage its day-to-day implementation? These would turn out to be political decisions that in a few years would come close to tearing the TVA apart (McCraw 1971; Callahan 1980), but in 1933, regionalist visionaries had yet to face that fact. The TVA's regionalist enthusiasts could for now bask in the bright hope of their own interpretations of the agency's promise (for regionalist enthusiasm see Draper 1934; NPB 1934; Draper 1933; Morgan 1933; Hodge 1938; Odum and Moore 1938; NRC 1935).

These kinds of details and controversies did not at present worry Marshall Dana or his associates; the vagueness of regional planning left them open to imagine. Following their brainstorming meeting on the train, the new regional planners of Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Montana attended the Tri-State Development League's meeting in Pendleton, Oregon, the next day (Bessey, Minutes of Joint Meeting of Advisory Boards, September 18, 1933, NRPB Records). Before retiring that second

night, they met once more. It was at this third meeting that they began to make critical connections between region and river. Having attended in close succession a meeting on regional planning and a meeting on Columbia River navigation, and with the Tennessee Valley in the back of their minds, they connected Pacific Northwest regional planning and Columbia River development. They came to the conclusion that navigation from the lower Columbia River to Lewiston, Idaho should be considered as one project, and that this should be part of a comprehensive plan for the Columbia Basin or the Pacific Northwest (Bessey, Minutes of Meeting after Umatilla Rapids Hearing, September 18, 1933, NRPB Records).

Over the next few months, Dana worked with the National Planning Board to hammer out what a regional planning organization should look like. The four states of Public Works Administration District V would codify state planning boards under new federal guidelines. Representatives from these state planning boards, together with Dana as chairman, would make up the regional planning organization. Dana's assistant Roy Bessey was quickly hired as regional consultant (Dana to Charles W. Eliot, August 29, 1933, NRPB Records; Eliot to Dana, August 24, 1933, NRPB Records; Dana to Charles W. Eliot, December 18, 1933, NRPB Records, 1933e). The regional planning group's makeup, in other words, would closely resemble the gathering called by Dana back in September aboard the Union Pacific train.

Thus it was that shared economic self-interest in Columbia River development first came together with vague ideas and ideals of regionalism, the two joined by the New Deal promise of public works. These September 1933 meetings did not by themselves launch major new thinking about the Pacific Northwest, or about the region's ties to the Columbia River system, but they were seminal nonetheless. They marked the initiation of a new regional organization, and of a two-year-long discussion about Pacific Northwest regional planning. This discussion would sharpen and grow until, in late 1935, the Pacific Northwest Regional Planning Commission would crystallize a clear definition of the Pacific Northwest. This regional definition would shape both the Pacific Northwest region and the Columbia River through the many decades to come.

THE CONTINGENCY OF REGIONS: ALTERNATIVE PACIFIC NORTHWESTS

Getting to a clear definition of the Pacific Northwest region was not a straightforward matter. Outlines of the pieces that would come together into a definition of the Pacific Northwest were there, in September 1933: an initial territory – consisting then of the full state territories of Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Montana – and corresponding set of state government members; a common interest in Columbia River development; motivation and direction for coordination from federal planning and public works efforts; and an incipient notion of regional organization as a way to improve prosperity while conserving resources in a common area. But so far, the region's territory and membership were simply an agglomeration of four states, the future unifying force was little more than a strategic alliance of activists with planners to try to obtain more generous federal public works money, and both federal direction and regional conceptions were vague.

It was not at all evident, in late 1933 or early 1934, that if a clear definition of the Pacific Northwest were to be formed, it would be a region consisting of Washington, Oregon, Idaho and western Montana, unified by the Columbia River. Although the PNWRPC began as a four-state agency which expressed shared interest in Columbia River development, even to PNWRPC planners, it was not yet clear that these organizational beginnings should together constitute a region.

There were other possible Pacific Northwests. Between late 1933 and late 1935, the PNWRPC grappled or interacted with at least six potential ways to conceptualize or organize a Pacific Northwest region or a set of Pacific Northwest regions, that were different from the one they settled on in late 1935. I call these “alternative regionalizations.” Uncovering these alternative Pacific Northwest regionalizations is essential background for recognizing the significance of the regional definition the PNWRPC adopted late in 1935. Recognizing the existence of alternative potential Pacific Northwests destabilizes the easy assumptions so common today that the Columbia River is a natural, timeless regional connector, and that the area consisting of Washington,

Oregon, Idaho and western Montana is the Columbia's natural, ageless region. These assumptions derive, I argue, precisely from the success of the PNWRPC's regional definition of a Columbia River's Pacific Northwest that was crystallized in late 1935.

An examination of the six alternative regionalizations of the Pacific Northwest between late 1933 and late 1935 reveals the PNWRPC's early conceptions of and hopes for Pacific Northwest regionalism. In these first two years, PNWRPC members and the many civic, business and political leaders who jumped in to work with them showed tremendous enthusiasm about the potential to build a better society through regional coordination. They hoped to achieve better social and economic outcomes, improved stewardship of natural resources, and wise, efficient incorporation of everyone's needs and work efforts. It did not matter where or what, exactly, the region was; the point was to network across space to find common cause, to bring together the many smart, capable people who shared interests in a broad range of possibilities, to create common good by understanding and strengthening interconnections of land, water, trade, infrastructure; and to encourage democracy through wide participation in planning.

And yet, it is precisely in this moment of enthusiasm that the inherent limitations of regionalists' visions begin to become clear. The truth is, despite the claims of regionalists about how regions should develop or be uncovered, there was no single inherent, organic Pacific Northwest regional territory or identity, no specific spatial organization of region that naturally best related to the Columbia River or to some other obviously unifying environmental or social feature or features. Corollary to this, there was no single region that could somehow, if nurtured properly, be more inclusive, sustainable, balanced in its development, or democratic than other ways of organizing territory. Every one of the six alternative Pacific Northwest regionalizations rested on particular assumptions about what connections were most important, what should be the core regional organizing principles, who should be the central participants in regional decision-making, who and what were to be the central beneficiaries of regional policy. When one lines the six alternative regionalizations up side by side, examining each in turn, it becomes apparent that choosing any one would be a political choice, and would inevitably favor some people, interests, and connections over others.

This section reviews each of the six alternative regionalizations in turn. It is instructive to think of them in terms of how they were organized, since this was a key part of the discussion among regionalists about the right and wrong ways to organize society. Two potential regionalizations were simply administrative regions: the four-state area of the initial Pacific Northwest Regional Planning Commission, and a proposed three-state planning region. Three possible regionalizations were thematic: a fisheries-based region centered on coastal Washington and British Columbia, extending potentially north to Alaska, south to California, and inland to Idaho; the Columbia Basin itself; and a proposed set of “scientific” regions that would have split the commission’s initial four-state area into four other regions. Although in some ways these thematic regions best fit the idealized notions of how regions should be organized, they were the least viable as long-lasting planning and organizational regions. A sixth regionalization, probably the most common conception of the time, was a trade-based region with a loose sense of an urban core in Portland and Puget Sound, perhaps Spokane, perhaps Vancouver, BC, tied to an expansive but ill-defined hinterland to the east and north.

For each of these six alternative regionalizations, I consider in some detail its geographical identity and focus, its origins, its promoters, the assumptions and goals built into it, and who and what was included as a result of all of these. Then, I tell its story over the two years between late 1933 and late 1935: how and when it was promoted, and what happened to the actual geography of planning, networking and coordination in response. Building on its history, I analyze the practical advantages and disadvantages of each regionalization as a potential territory for regional planning and governance. Perhaps unsurprisingly, each regionalization’s practical survival depended on its ability to match or accommodate existing basic political and economic geographies.

Alternative Regionalization #1 (Administrative): Four States Grouped for Organizational and Administrative Convenience

The first potential regionalization was a four-state Pacific Northwest consisting of Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Montana. This was simply the four-state administrative district of the Public Works Administration from which the Pacific Northwest Regional Planning Commission initially grew (figure 2.1). In this regionalization, the importance of the region and the regional commission was mostly organizational – a way to group a few states, but not too many, for easier federal coordination. It provided for a fairly inclusive, but rather scattered, approach. Functionally, it could work on projects throughout the four-state area but risked quick exhaustion of resources; and the piecemeal approach could not unify a region.

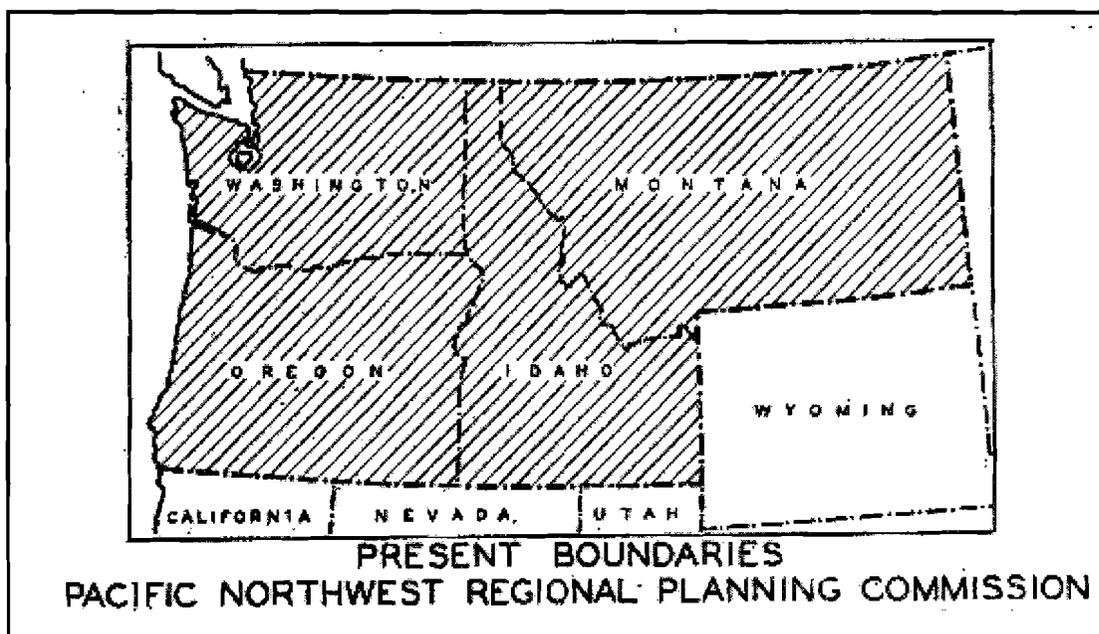


Figure 2.1. A four-state administrative Pacific Northwest. *Source:* NRC 1936, 104.

While limited, a certain regional focus came from the Regional Advisor, Marshall Dana. As suggested by the way the PNWRPC first began, in late 1933 and early 1934, the newly designated state planners from the four states of the Public Works Administration's district were still mostly rooted in state-based goals and perspectives,

though they shared a willingness to collaborate. Dana himself was no regionalist visionary, nor was there any significant regionalist movement in the Pacific Northwest or leading regionalist thinkers to push the regional planning commission or Dana forward. What Dana did have was a dedication to his new role as public servant of a four-state area, a typical mainstream belief of the time in the benefits to be gained by resource and economic development, and a vast number of contacts spread out over a wide area, built up from years of newspaper work and navigation and irrigation activism. Dana had great hopes of an economically and industrially developed Pacific Northwest. But even so, he shared some of the concerns of regionalists. Having worked for years with inland farmers and merchants on navigation issues, Dana hoped to promote decentralized industry, to avoid the urban problems of the Northeast and Midwest, and to bring prosperity to rural areas.⁵

Dana also brought to the commission and a potential four-state region a strong belief in bottom-up democracy and state sovereignty (McKinley 1952; Bessey 1963). This was compatible with the geography of his Public Works Administration district, defined as it was by state boundaries. Given both his state-centered democratic values and his state-bounded district, Dana instinctively and ably built a regional organization made up of state representatives. While the district itself had been created by the federal government, then, membership and participation were organized around the participation of the four separate states. Dana also involved local organization and government. While local groups were not offered representation on the regional commission, the commission worked hard to build forums for local communities and local civic groups to influence planning priorities (see e.g. Dana to Charles W. Eliot, August 29, 1933, NRPB Records, 1934j; PNWRPC 1935b; Bessey, Relation of City Planning to State, Regional and

5. Both Dana's own writings (Dana 1930; Lockley and Dana 1934-- also Dana wrote many articles in *The Oregon Journal*) and others' (Ogden 1949) show that he was a noted promoter of Columbia River development for navigation and irrigation from early on. He was also, however, one of the leaders in the effort to protect the scenic Columbia River Gorge from development (Abbott, Adler, and Abbott 1997) and, as shown from many letters and other archival materials, he also placed considerable importance on fisheries conservation. He became the first president of the National Reclamation Association in 1932 (Ogden 1949). He was very supportive of multi-purpose Columbia River development, and in the early New Deal was very open to a CVA if that would have furthered Columbia River development. His own papers (Marshall Newport Dana Papers, Ax 21, Division of Special Collections and University Archives, University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon) show that later on he became a rabid opponent of a CVA, still working with the National Reclamation Association, which spearheaded the opposition (Ogden 1949; Voeltz 1960).

National Planning, May 4, 1934, NRPB Records). As described before, the district had been given essential inspiration by connections with a grass-roots effort to improve navigation from Portland, Oregon to Lewiston, Idaho. Now, it was further brought to life by more widespread state and local participation.

Within Dana's own framework, he aimed sincerely to be inclusive and broad-minded, and he worked hard to find ways for regional coordination of public works to help the many, not just the few. Regional consultant Roy Bessey also worked hard toward these ends. Included in this goal were a few key regionalist principles – including integrated thinking, urban-rural balance, resource conservation, protection of scenic areas, and wide sharing and distribution of resource benefits. The commission's first planning conference illustrated the early open-ended, inclusive and vaguely regionalist nature of Dana's approach. In March 1934, just two months after its own founding, the Pacific Northwest Regional Planning Commission sponsored what would be the first of five Pacific Northwest regional planning conferences it held between 1933 and 1939. Nearly 500 people attended – most from Oregon and Washington but also over twenty each from Idaho and Montana, and a couple dozen from states and provinces beyond. Speakers and committee participants provided perspective from Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana and British Columbia; from farmers and foresters, small towns and big cities. Committees formed, presentations were given, and discussions ensued on almost any kind of resource or economic development issue. There was independent attention, for example, on timber, trade, transportation, employment, national parks and migration, and water resources development. Topical committees included diverse concerns – what we might call “stakeholder interests” today. Thus the water resources committee had representatives addressing not only power, flood control and reclamation, but also fisheries, municipal water supply, recreation, and pollution. There was also a committee on the conservation of the scenic Columbia River Gorge, where Bonneville Dam was to be built (PNWRPC 1934a).

Despite both the inclusive approach and the democratic, state- and local community-centered approach of the four-state administrative region, however, the Pacific Northwest region Dana conceived and began to help build inevitably served

limited interests. The vast majority of Dana's contacts and advisors were white men in influential business, governmental or academic roles. Though Dana and his assistant Bessey and others on the regional planning commission invoked the suffering farm wife in expressing their concerns for needed rural electrification, few women were involved in the commission in positions other than secretary. There was a muted sense of relief expressed in commission members' statements about the relative racial homogeneity of the Pacific Northwest (Dana to Jacob Crane, August 22, 1935, NRPB Records). Most notably, given the massive transformation of Columbia River hydrology and ecology they were soon to endorse, Dana and the rest of the commission members showed a complete lack of awareness of Native American tribes' treaty-reserved rights to fish, hunt and gather throughout almost all of the commission's four-state territory.⁶ Thus, while the four-state administrative region was broad, inclusive and democratic in many ways, it was never all-inclusive or universally democratic.

The problems for region-building, though, were not the limits of inclusion but rather the lack of unity and focus, and the strictures of state-based boundaries. The lack of unity and focus threatened a scattered approach and quick exhaustion of the regional planning commission's resources. The state-based boundaries, while providing an important way to organize democratic participation and a clear source of legal authority for the regional commission's organization and plans, cut across many resource systems, while lumping in parts of too many to consider thoroughly – including, for example, a large part of the upper Missouri Basin as well as most of the Columbia Basin. Because the regional commission remained basically a collection of four separate states without a shared goal other than doling out public works monies, it simply couldn't motivate or create the deep commonalities, relationships and other ties that could hold a region fully together.

6. Indeed the only mention I found of Native Americans' treaty-reserved rights to fish, hunt and gather in the PNWRPC records was a short article in the PNWRPC's *Planning News* on "Quinault Indian Problems." The article stated, "It appears that under the treaty entered into between the Indians and Territorial Governor Stevens in 1854, the Indians were given definite rights so far as hunting and fishing were concerned." The article noted that when recently Washington State had passed a law prohibiting the sale of steelhead, an important source of income for the Quinault, the Quinault retaliated by prohibiting hunting and fishing by white men on its reservation. Lamented the article's author, "This is a particularly attractive area, especially to the eastern tourist. Indians acting as guides on fishing and hunting trips add color to the experience." Still failing to recognize the limits on state authority over Indian law and lands, the governor was now collecting facts to make a decision about these "problems."

Alternative Regionalization #2 (Administrative): Three States in a New National Planning Proposal

The second potential regionalization was a three-state Pacific Northwest of Washington, Oregon and Idaho (figure 2.2). Similar to the four-state region, it originated from the Pacific Northwest Regional Planning Commission's parent agency, now renamed the National Resources Board, and suggested a broadly inclusive approach to resource and economic development. Like its four-state counterpart, though, it had too many troubles to motivate real region-building. Indeed, it was even less viable as a region, and never gained traction in the Pacific Northwest.

Unlike the mixed federal and regional origins of the four-state commission, the impetus for a three-state planning region was entirely top-down from Washington D.C.

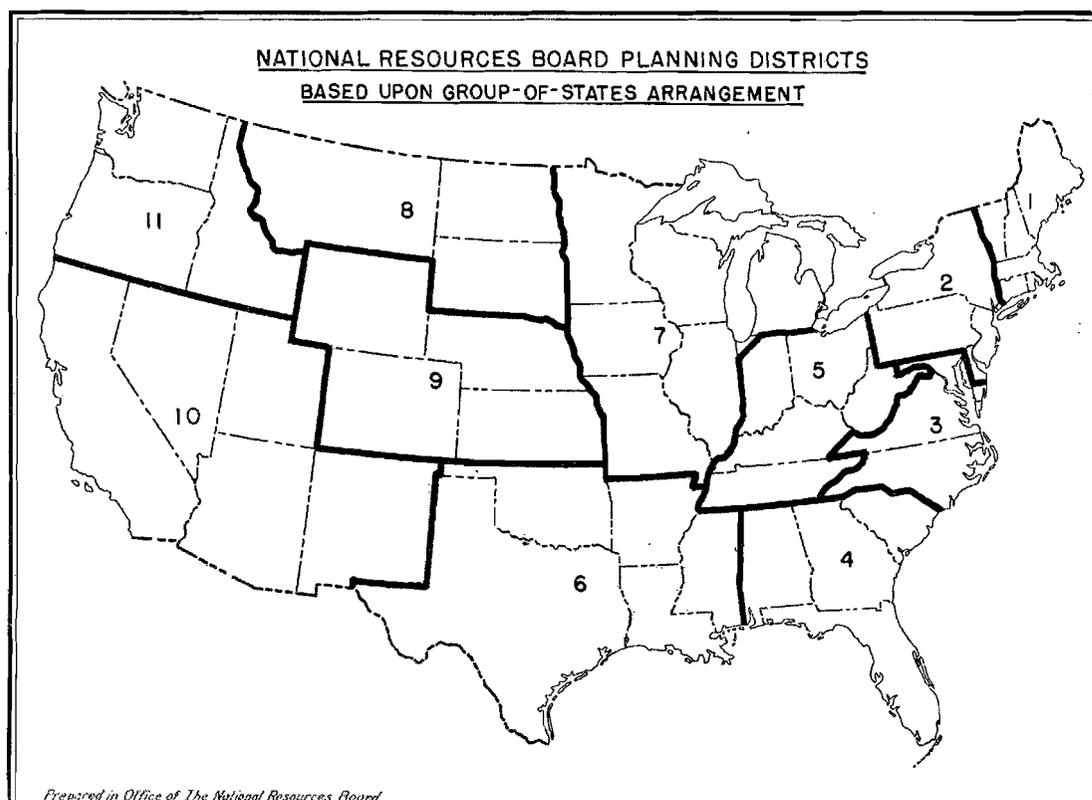


Figure 2.2. New planning districts under the National Resources Board, 1934, showing a three-state administrative Pacific Northwest. *Source:* NRC 1935, 162.

and state and local leaders never bought into it. In March, 1934, only eight months after Marshall Dana's appointment by the Public Works Administration and only two months after the Pacific Northwest Regional Planning Commission's first official meeting, the Public Works Administration announced a new organization of planning agencies and districts. State planning and regional planning offices were placed directly underneath the National Planning Board. In the Northwest corner of the country, a new District 11 would have only three states – Washington, Oregon, and Idaho. Montana would join the two Dakotas in a new District 8 (Dana to H. M. Waite, March 16, 1934, NRPB Records). Three months later, in June, 1934, the national planning agency was reorganized as well. The National Planning Board was terminated and its functions were moved out of the Public Works Administration to become a cabinet agency, the National Resources Board⁷ that would deal with a much broader range of planning than just public works (Roosevelt 1934; Dana 1934).

This regionalization had similar advantages and limitations as the four-state administrative district which made up the Pacific Northwest Regional Planning Commission's initial district. If anything, though, the challenges were worse. First, as a general planning agency responsible for far more than public works, its focus would be even broader and therefore more scattered. If its parent agency's subsequent activities suggest any guide to how a general regional planning agency in the Pacific Northwest might have acted, a general planning district implied an enormously large and difficult mandate. As an independent executive agency, the National Resources Board and its successors⁷ would grow over the next several years to encompass not just resource development and the development of specific areas but broad governmental reorganization and economic planning. The national planning agency became weighed down by the enormity of its task, and faced growing resistance from myriad government and business organizations with vested interest in the economic and political status quo (Lepawsky 1976; Warken 1969; Friedmann and Weaver 1979; Clawson 1981; Reagan 1999; Graham 1976). Similar ambitions would likely have mired a three-state general planning district in similar difficulties.

7. National Resources Committee, 1935-1939; National Resources Planning Board, 1939-1943

The second reason the three-state district was even less tenable as a region than the four-state district was that the four states working together in the PNWRPC all opposed removing Montana from the Pacific Northwest region (Dana to H. M. Waite, March 16, 1934, NRPB Records; PNWRPC, Minutes, August 11, 1934, NRPB Records; G. H. Clapp to Dana, April 10, 1934, NRPB Records). It is not entirely clear from the PNWRPC archival records why there was such strong opposition, but the records suggest five likely reasons. First, it seems that downstream states wanted to be able to have input on any developments that might affect the large volume of the Columbia Basin's water which originates in tributaries in Montana.⁸ Second, reciprocally, Montana wanted to make sure the downstream states did not make plans for its waters without its input (Comments on outline for study of regional planning, April, 1935, NRPB Records; PNWRPC, Minutes, August 11, 1934, NRPB Records). Third, the private Montana Power Company wanted Montana to remain a part of the Pacific Northwest region. Montana Power and Washington Water Power Company had joined transmission grids and coordinated power distribution and delivery across a wide area of eastern Washington, northern Idaho and western Montana. They also had a joint political aim, to fight against the development of too-cheap power from the future Grand Coulee Dam (Washington Water Power Company, Petition to the Federal Emergency Administrator of Public Works, October 5, 1933, NRPB Records). It is likely that Montana Power, and Montana with it, feared that if Montana were split off from the Pacific Northwest for public works planning, they would lose influence over Grand Coulee and other future federal power projects in Idaho and Washington.⁹ Fourth, the members of the PNWRPC, while new to their work, had already invested considerable time and energy into their four-state working relationships. Thus there was reluctance to start all over again with a

8. Columbia River development was clearly at least part of Dana's and Bessey's concerns: when Dana initially wrote to his Washington D.C. bosses saying the separation with Montana would be problematic, he suggested that not only Montana but also the Columbia Basin portion of Wyoming should be included in the region (Dana to H. M. Waite, March 16, 1934, NRPB Records). Several months later, Bessey also emphasized the importance of British Columbia's portion of the Columbia Basin, and asked whether a relationship should be built with British Columbia to collect correlated data (Bessey to Charles W. Eliot, August 7, 1934, NRPB Records).

9. Indeed, a Montana representative to the Pacific Northwest Regional Planning Commission noted the state's shared power grids in an August appeal to Washington D.C. planners as justification for Montana – eastern Montana as well as western, he emphasized, because of shared power – to remain a part of the Pacific Northwest planning region (J. S. James to Morris Cooke, August 17, 1934, NRPB Records).

new configuration (Dana to H. M. Waite, March 16, 1934, NRPB Records; PNWRPC, Minutes, August 11, 1934, NRPB Records). Finally, Montana seemed to see membership in the PNWRPC as an important avenue to obtain federal funds for projects within Montana. The PNWRPC was, after all, organized and off to a running start, in close contact with the PWA and national planners, while its new northern Great Plains district had yet to pull together.¹⁰

In short, splitting Montana off from the states to its west threatened to cut off powerful interests and actors from resource decisions they cared about, and from working relationships in which they had invested considerable time and energy. The resulting opposition doomed this three-state regionalization. Montanan officials continued to meet with the Pacific Northwest group. In late 1934, there would be a brief few months in which the three-state region seemed to have real power; this galvanized the PNWRPC to come to a better articulated defense of its regional connections with Montana. Armed with this rhetoric and a united front, the four states hung together.

Alternative Regionalization #3 (Thematic): Coastal Fisheries Region

If the goal of the Pacific Northwest Regional Planning Commission had been to build on existing interjurisdictional cooperation or shared ecologies, it might well have picked a different geography, and a different focus. One strong possibility would have been a focus on fisheries, and a corresponding focus on the North Pacific territories of Washington and British Columbia, perhaps extending from Oregon, even California, to Alaska, and more remotely, coordinating with Idaho as well (figure 2.3). In contrast to an administrative district, such a region might at least theoretically have functioned as a much more unified region of shared society and environment. It would not, however, have promised restraint in development, an honoring of natural ecosystems' character and functioning, nor the participation in decision-making of too-often-marginalized fishers such as Native Americans and residents of small coastal commercial fishing

10. The importance that Montana planners placed on access through the Pacific Northwest Regional Planning Commission was highlighted just a few months later, in December, 1934, during the second Pacific Northwest Regional Planning Conference. Montana's Pacific Northwest Regional Planning Commission representative asked for help from conference attendees getting Montana's plans into the hands of those who could make those plans happen (James 1934).

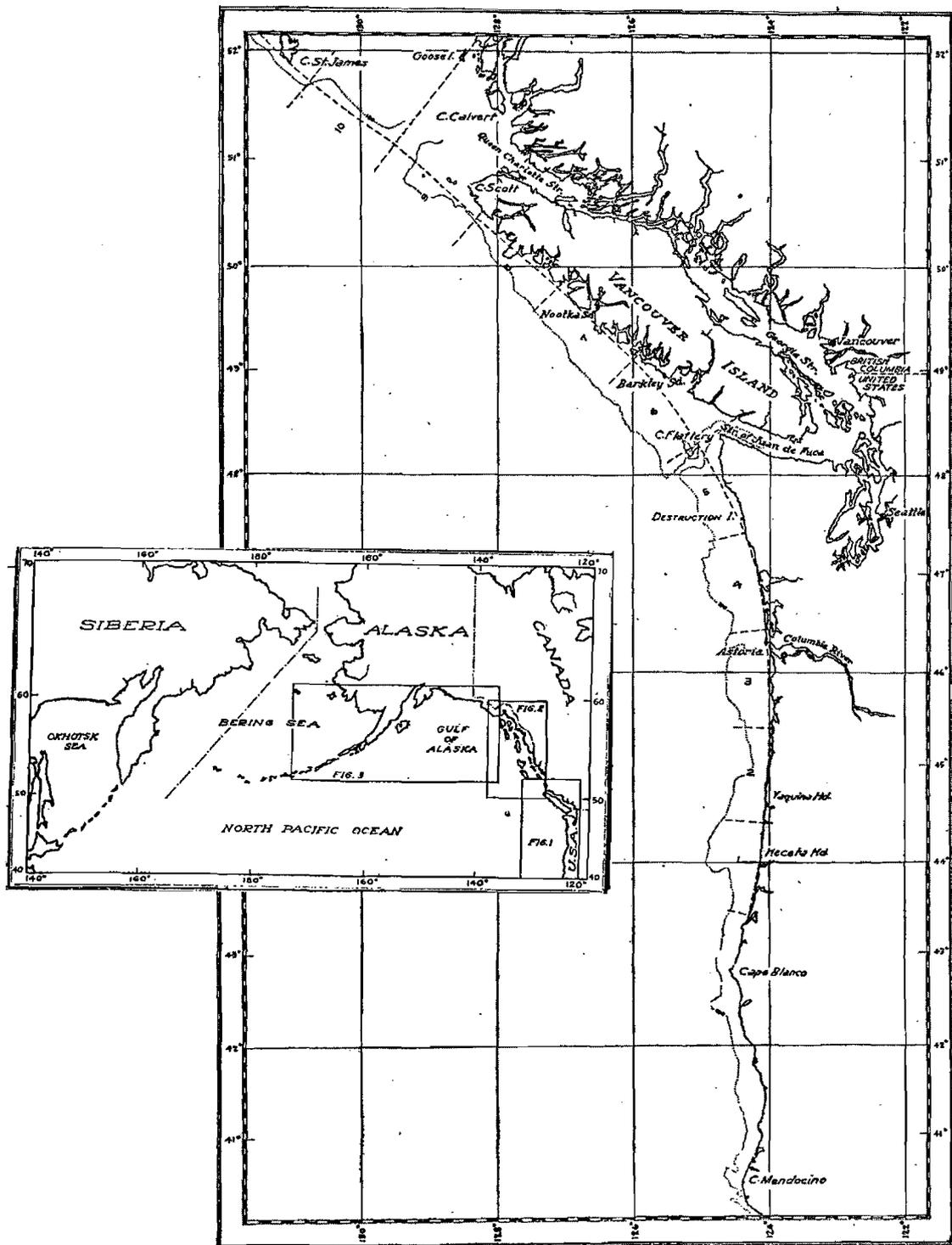


Figure 2.3. A possible Pacific Northwest fisheries region, as suggested here by maps from Thompson and Freeman (1930). The inset map shows the range covered by the halibut studies; the larger map is a close-up map of the middle range of the North Pacific Coast.

communities. Practically, its more important limitation was that it offered insufficient motivation to hold distant and fundamentally distinct jurisdictions and communities together.

In the 1920s, Washington state and British Columbia researchers had built a joint research project to study halibut, a wide-ranging oceanic fish. These studies, and the new regulations which followed, were widely credited by scientists and fishers with saving the halibut fisheries (Thompson 1935; Thompson and Freeman 1930). Now, fisheries advocates and scientists had begun to envision a similar research effort for salmon. Again, the interest was international. Salmon fishers and scientists were concerned about Fraser River salmon, which passed through Washington's portion of Puget Sound before returning to the British Columbia river. This geography allowed American fishers to trap enormous numbers of the Fraser River fish, for a short but critical portion of the adult salmon's long migratory journey back from oceanic waters off Alaska. Understandably, fishers on the Canadian side were concerned about the large American catch of these Fraser River-bound salmon, before the fish re-entered Canadian waters. Fishers on the American side, for their part, were concerned that development within the Fraser River basin could doom the Fraser River fish stocks entirely. The Fraser has sometimes been called the Columbia's twin to the north; like the Columbia River the Fraser drains a large rich watershed, which historically supported (and still supports) prodigious runs of salmon. The concern about Fraser basin development had sharpened after railroad construction along the river caused a major rock fall in 1917, which had blocked salmon passage for most of the annual migration season. Fraser River salmon numbers had plummeted thereafter, worrying salmon fishers on both sides of the international border. Canadians, though, while alarmed by this decline, were uninterested in stronger habitat protections if a better-protected river system would produce fish only for Americans to catch. Both sides, then, had something to gain from an agreement that would limit the American catch and require conservation of the Fraser River habitat (Bell memorandum to the Secretary of Commerce, July 17, 1935, NRPB Records; Evendon 2004; Lichatowich 1999).

The new enthusiasm for scientific research and inter-jurisdictional regulatory cooperation carried over beyond the Fraser River. With the building of Bonneville and Grand Coulee dams, which would be much more permanent than the Fraser River rock fall, many thought that Columbia River salmon numbers might drop precipitously (Washington State Planning Council, Resolution, June 23, 1934, NRPB Records; McGowan to Miller Freeman, July 11, 1934, NRPB Records; L. M. Kaistetter, Letter to Editor, August 15, 1934, *Oregon Journal*, NRPB Records; PNWRPC Advisory Technical Council, Fisheries Section, Minutes, June 15, 1934, NRPB Records; Salmon at the dam, newspaper article, [August 11?,] 1934, NRPB Records) – and so there was growing interest in a regional fisheries research program that might focus especially on Columbia Basin salmon.

The still relatively new Washington State Planning Board took the lead, particularly board member Miller Freeman (Minutes, Advisory Technical Committee, April 10, 1934, NRPB Records; Freeman to Jno. P. Babcock, April 16, 1934, NRPB Records). Freeman was publisher of the influential trade journal *Pacific Fisherman* and had long been active in both the halibut research program and efforts to pass a Fraser River salmon treaty (Wright 1977). Appointed chair of the Washington State Planning Board's fisheries committee, Freeman reached out to the Pacific Northwest Regional Planning Commission to try to coordinate with Oregon and Idaho (Freeman to Bessey, March 19, 1934, NRPB Records). Those knowledgeable about the fishing industry also suggested coordination with Alaska – a natural extension, both because Fraser River and Columbia River salmon migrated to Alaskan waters, and because the prolific Alaskan fishery was so often financed and equipped, and the fish processed and shipped, by Puget Sound businesses (Power 1934; Wenner 1936).

All together, this suggested a region of fisheries planning and coordination that would center around the Washington state-British Columbia area, and extend from southern Oregon, perhaps even California, all the way to Alaska, and inland along the main river basins (Wenner 1936 in particular lays out this geography quite clearly). If this geographical range could have been made a region for more general regional planning and region-building, it would have offered significant advantages for anyone interested in

regionalist goals in the Pacific Northwest: it was an area linked by shared ecologies and hydrologies, a major industry, and at its center had established, successful inter-jurisdictional scientific and regulatory coordination and institutions.

Even in the case of coordination in a fisheries-based region, though, civic leaders of the 1930s embedded their own assumptions, with the result that such a region would have served a limited set of goals for fish and a limited set of people. The fisheries scientists whom Freeman gathered together to plan a regional program of scientific research were in some ways quite sophisticated and critical in their thinking about salmon research, and in some ways quite limited and conventional. They were aware of and concerned about such complexities of salmon ecology as life history variations among the many different runs of different streams and lakes. They recognized the significant impact on fisheries of human activities like logging, dams and water diversions. But they still focused much of their attention on hatcheries, most of them still buying in to the notion – despite already-strong warnings – that the right kind of hatchery could produce good substitute “habitat” for all that was being lost. A program of river-based research was designed to categorize which streams were most important for salmon rearing and which streams could basically be given over to development. In short, fisheries committee members and their associated scientists seemed to see streams or portions of streams piecemeal, as interchangeable parts, rather than as an interconnected system – ultimately a major failing for protection of ecological function and integrity. Equally significant, the main goal was clearly production of salmon numbers, not protection of salmon geographical and life history diversity (U.S. Biological Station, Report to the Fisheries Committees, June 8, 1934, NRPB Records; Thompson to Miller Freeman, April 17, 1934, NRPB Records; Bessey 1934e; PNWRPC Advisory Technical Council, Fisheries Section, Minutes, June 15, 1934, NRPB Records). This was a goal which would serve downriver and ocean fishers, and perhaps sport fishers of some selected streams where runs would be supplemented by hatcheries, but not the Native American tribes who had long lived on the huge salmon runs which swam far into the interior of the Columbia and the Fraser basins. There was also no particular attention paid to the great losses faced by small coastal commercial fishing communities as industrial and sport

fishing expanded, fish numbers declined, and urban populations often forced regulations which hurt small communities worst of all (Taylor 1999). Freeman's interest in fisheries grew out of his ties to west coast industrial fishing (Wright 1977); so the priorities of the scientific committee are not surprising.

But as with the administrative regions, the limits of inclusion were not what doomed region-building in this regionalization. The first problem was the legal and political difficulties of coordination across the jurisdictions which a fisheries region would group together. Coordination with British Columbia would require international diplomacy of two federal governments, as well as agreement between each federal government and the smaller sovereign jurisdictions of several states and one province.¹¹ Marshall Dana, Miller Freeman, and many others involved in regional planning and research in the Pacific Northwest states were very protective of state authority and reluctant to collaborate too much with the U.S. federal government, for fear of relinquishing too much authority (Freeman to Dana, March 19, 1934, NRPB Records; Thompson to Miller Freeman, April 17, 1934, NRPB Records; Dana to B. M. Brennan, May 16, 1934, NRPB Records; Dana to Cox, April 6, 1934, NRPB Records; Freeman 1934e). Alaska was almost as problematic. Still a territory, its fisheries were governed directly by the U.S. federal government (Freeman to C. L. Alsberg, August 21, 1934, NRPB Records); thus coordination with Alaska posed similar risks for state sovereignty.

If inter-jurisdictional collaboration was difficult, an even bigger problem was that fisheries issues did not provide sufficient motivation and incentive to overcome these and other barriers to coordination. Indeed, Freeman and others could not bring the potential fisheries region together in sustained collaboration even for the limited purpose of fisheries research. In a series of regional research meetings (Freeman to Jno. P. Babcock, April 16, 1934, NRPB Records; Thompson to Miller Freeman, April 17, 1934, NRPB Records; Minutes, Advisory Technical Committee, April 10, 1934, NRPB Records; PNWRPC Advisory Technical Council, Fisheries Section, Minutes, June 15, 1934, NRPB Records), Washington and British Columbia planners and scientists attended

11. The international diplomacy needed to protect Fraser River fish was underway. A treaty had been negotiated in 1930 but was not yet ratified by the United States. Much of the correspondence from Freeman to Dana and others concerned the urgent need for the US to ratify the Fraser River treaty.

regularly, but their invitations to Oregon reaped much less interest and participation (Thompson to Dana, July 31, 1934, NRPB Records; Dana Memo to Bessey, October 5, 1934, NRPB Records; Dana to M. F. Corrigan, May 3, 1934, NRPB Records). A two-day fisheries conference at the second Pacific Northwest Regional Planning Conference in December 1934 marked the height of regional coordination, but speakers showed a complete lack of unity of vision or priority (Foster 1934; Freeman 1934e; Lucas 1934; McClure 1934; PNWRPC Division of Fisheries 1934; Power 1934; Robins and Division of Water Resources and Power 1934). After that point, fish advocates and scientists fragmented again by area to focus on their local stocks and basins.

The central problem was that collaboration centered on fisheries suggested regulations and restrictions. Very few people were willing to face fishing restrictions for some very broad, regional-scale conservation goal. Only in the narrow cases of very local conflicts over fisheries, such as in the lower Columbia River and the Puget Sound-Fraser River area, did inter-jurisdictional regulatory agreements come about, and, in both cases, only after decades of conflict and fisheries decline (Evendon 2004; Taylor 1999). Lack of willingness to consider restrictions was compounded by the decline of the fishing industry in the critically important states of Washington and Oregon. Demographics had shifted by 1930 to make these two states predominantly urban; with this, political pressure for water development now outweighed pressure for protection of fisheries. In the Columbia River in particular, there was wide acceptance that fisheries would decline with the building of Bonneville and Grand Coulee Dams. Policy-makers in these states hitched any fisheries concerns its residents had not to wide geographical coordination to protect the many habitats and populations of salmon, but rather to the reassurances of hatcheries and fish passage through dams (Taylor 1999).

There was perhaps one variety of fisheries coordination left across the potential fisheries region. It amounted to a rather tacit acceptance that fisheries stocks would decline south of the Fraser River basin, which might be compensated for in part by conservation of Fraser River stocks. This did not require inter-jurisdictional collaboration across the wide Northeast Pacific salmon range. It required, rather, that fisheries advocates on both sides of the international border between Washington and British

Columbia re-focus their efforts on a single river basin. Freeman in 1935 would call the Fraser River the “last stand” for salmon from Sacramento to British Columbia (Freeman to Dana, May 6, 1935, NRPB Records) (see also Freeman to Dana, May 6, 1935, NRPB Records; Freeman to B. H. Kizer, August 29, 1935, NRPB Records; Freeman to Secretary of Commerce, September 3, 1935, NRPB Records), and he would help shepherd through a Fraser River treaty at last in 1938 (Wright 1977)– the same year Bonneville Dam started operation on the Columbia.¹² A kind of regional coordination which largely abandoned a river basin the size of the Columbia to dams, while fighting to protect habitat in another was not, however, necessarily the kind of regional coordination imagined by regionalists.

Alternative Regionalization #4 (Thematic): Columbia River Basin

A fourth possible regionalization, also based on a central shared resource, was the Columbia River Basin itself (figure 2.4). At a time when dams along the Columbia River offered the great resource and economic development potential of the age, and the Tennessee Valley Authority had gained national attention, it was natural to look toward basin-wide development in the Columbia. Even as the PNWRPC was just getting organized in late 1933, Washington Senator’s C. C. Dill was drafting a bill for a Columbia Valley Authority (CVA) (Dana to Charles W. Eliot, December 18, 1933, NRPB Records; Dill telegram to Dana, December 2, 1933, NRPB Records, Dill to Dana, November 18, 1933, NRPB Records). The TVA had been inspired in large part by regionalist ideals, and aimed to unite the Tennessee Valley region with a single federal agency that could coordinate many facets of resource management, economic

12. This division of purposes and policies between the Fraser and the Columbia River continued; it represents important ongoing intra-regional or inter-regional coordination (within one region or between two regions, depending on one’s definition of region) and has too often been ignored. Three major works recently compared the widespread damming of the Columbia River to the commitment to keep the Fraser free-flowing (Evendon 2004; Lichatowich 1999; ISG 1996). The problem with this comparison is that, as shown in this history, the decisions about the two rivers’ different policies were not independent. Again in the 1960s, Americans and Canadians agreed to further develop Columbia River hydropower further while continuing to keep dams off the mainstem Fraser River to protect its fisheries (Krutilla 1967; Swainson 1979; Vogel 2008b). Of the three works which compare the two rivers’ histories, only Evendon (2004) seems to fully recognize that it was American interests as much as Canadian wisdom that kept dams off the Fraser. It is worth noting another geographical part of the story: the American interests that advanced the Columbia River-Fraser River trade-off were from Puget Sound – which is not, as Alternative Regionalization #4 emphasizes, in the Columbia Basin. They had little to lose and much to gain from plans to dam the Columbia. The Fraser River was another matter entirely: its salmon were very important to Puget Sound interests.

development, and social support (Draper 1933; NPB 1934; NRC 1935; Clapp 1951; Friedmann and Weaver 1979; Chandler 1984; Dorman 1993). The CVA proposal

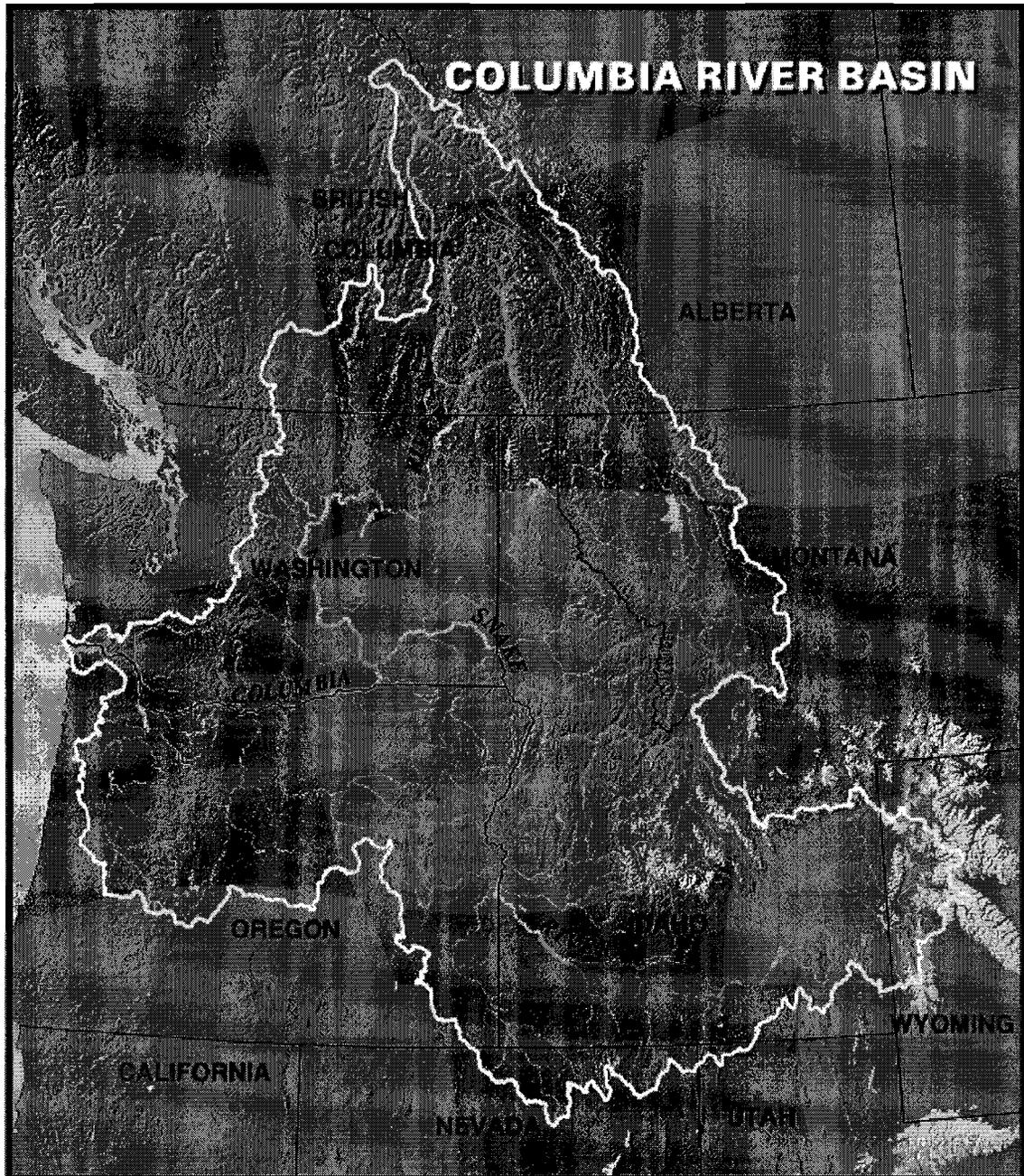


Figure 2.4. The Columbia Basin. *Source:* BPA, circa 1999.

was a call for a similar wide-ranging coordination of at least much of the Columbia Basin (Voeltz 1960; McKinley 1952).

The Army Corps had recently completed its “308” plan for basin-wide Columbia River development.¹³ A series of dams along the lower Columbia and Snake Rivers would increase power production and allow navigation to Lewiston, Idaho. Adding large dams in the upper basin would allow water to be kept upriver until needed, helping both power production and flood control. Upriver dams could also provide water for irrigation. All together, these would require something at least close to river-wide coordination (BPA 1980; Glickman [1949?]; U.S. Army Corps of Engineers 1933-4).¹⁴

More wide-ranging coordination of the whole watershed, as imagined in the CVA proposal – coordination of land use and conservation, economic and social development, industrial development, etc. – offered considerable promise for wider regional cohesion. Widely dispersed communities could share, through their coordination of river and watershed development, considerable and varied benefits that could make life better for almost all. Irrigation could be delivered to many upriver rural areas, most importantly to the Columbia and Snake River Plains; navigation could aid trade all along the Columbia-Snake corridor to Lewiston, Idaho; phenomenal quantities of electric power generation could electrify rural areas and enable rural industries; and an interconnected trade network could boost the interdependent relationship between the Columbia’s main port, Portland, and the vast hinterland of the Columbia Basin. In some ways, it would seem to fit the regionalist ideal of interconnected urban and rural areas with complementary functions and shared resources remarkably well.

Just as with other regional options, though, a Columbia Basin region could not guarantee wise stewardship of ecological systems or a socially inclusive sharing of benefits. Almost all the ambitions for river-wide coordination rested on dams, and dams fundamentally disrupt natural river processes which sustain rivers’ indigenous aquatic

13. Although the “308” reports were printed in 1932 as House Document 103, 73-1 (Glickman [1949?]), a letter from Dana in June 1934 to the Corps’ head at Bonneville Dam, Colonel Thomas M. Robins, suggests the reports had not yet been released to the public at that time (Dana to Col. Thomas M. Robins, June 16, 1934, NRPB Records).

14. Full Columbia River-wide coordination of water flows would in fact come about, in close correspondence to the initial Army Corps vision, in the mid-to-late 1960s (Krutilla 1967; Swainson 1979; Cone and Ridlington 1996; see also Vogel 2008b).

life. Those who benefited from natural river ecosystems, such as Native American and Native Canadian fishers – who still fished in the early 1930s in places ranging from the lower Columbia up to portions of the river system far into British Columbia and Idaho (Merkel 2001; Landeen and Pinkham 1999) – stood to lose out. Similarly, small communities which reservoirs would flood would have to be sacrificed. Especially if the basin's urban coming-together point, Portland, had undue influence on the development of the basin, the rural and more distant areas of the basin might be neglected or exploited mainly for economic gain for big companies and financiers in the big city. Still, if managed conscientiously, with a view to wide regional well-being, a Columbia Basin region might balance the potential gains of Portland with opportunities for rural and remote areas. Ideally, electricity and irrigation might be spread out as well as possible at affordable rates; this, as regionalists so often pointed out, could transform rural lives and provide opportunities for all kinds of improved agriculture and small industry.

The more practical problem, though, was that the geography of the river basin did not fit economic and political geography, and so it was doomed as a region. Indeed, none of the CVA or related proposals were actually bound by the hydrological boundaries of the Columbia Basin.

There were two fundamental problems with the Columbia Basin's geography as a region: some areas outside the basin were essential for any regional planning and region-building effort; and some areas in the basin were impractical to include, or actively resistant to inclusion. Most importantly, the Columbia Basin excludes northwestern Washington – the portion of Washington that appears to the upper left of the Columbia Basin, which is outlined in white, in figure 2.4. This includes all of the United States portion of Puget Sound, which means the cities of Seattle and Tacoma and the state capital in Olympia. These cities were and are major population centers and home to many of the most important and most influential civic, business and political leaders pushing for Columbia River development and greater regional coordination.

While regionalism may have aimed to build a region that could transcend state lines, inevitably a region which could plan and function within the existing U.S. political framework had to draw its political organization and legal authority from either

individual states or the U.S. federal government. If a Columbia Basin region were to be institutionalized with federal authority and jurisdiction rather than that of state governments, a river basin did have a key advantage as a regional territory: based on the federal government's constitutional jurisdiction over navigable waters, the federal government had the authority to plan and govern river basin development (NRC 1935; Clawson 1981; Friedmann and Weaver 1979).¹⁵ This was not true for a region defined by climate or ecosystems, or even social and cultural commonalities. But still, federal authority did not guarantee the *political* support necessary for a federal regionalist effort in the Columbia Basin. For this, the support of the Washington's Congressional delegation would be critical. Leaving northwest Washington out from full Columbia Basin regional development was simply never even considered.

Large sections of Oregon, a small corner of Idaho, and the bulk of Montana also lie outside the Columbia Basin. The most important of these was the large portion of Oregon. As Oregon's state government lent its energies to regional planning, it did not consider excluding a large portion of its territory any more than did Washington. Montana would turn out to be more willing to divide itself into two regions, but that would come later. Idaho was less of an issue, as almost the whole state lies within the Columbia Basin, and the small corner that does not has stronger ties to Salt Lake City and the Great Basin than it does to Seattle, Portland and the rest of any possible Pacific Northwest. That corner could be included in a Pacific Northwest region, or not.

Then there were the areas of the basin that were impractical to include – or which resisted inclusion. Most important was the Canadian portion of the basin, which constituted fifteen percent of the basin's land area and produced thirty percent of the river's water. While the hydrological links were obvious between the U.S. and Canadian portions of the basin, the political and legal ones were much more tenuous. Any kind of international planning or coordination would require the support of both British Columbia and the Canadian federal government. But money for Columbia River

15. FDR was fairly sure that a federal interstate river basin development agency would withstand court review of constitutionality, but he was not certain. In 1936 and again in 1939 the Supreme Court held that the TVA was constitutional; everyone associated with the TVA and, in the Pacific Northwest, everyone associated with the effort to create a regional power agency, breathed a deep sigh of relief. Chapter 3 discusses the ways the first TVA decision affected the effort to create a Pacific Northwest river basin agency.

development, major economic interests which stood to profit quickly from Columbia River development, and the push for Pacific Northwest regional planning and regionalism all came from the U.S. side. British Columbia officials in the 1930s recognized considerable development potential in the Canadian portion of the Columbia Basin, but it was simply not yet among their priorities (Krutilla 1967; Swainson 1979).¹⁶

The other jurisdiction outside the four PNWRPC states that controlled a significant share of the Columbia River's flow was Wyoming. The PNWRPC made overtures to Wyoming, but Wyoming refused to participate. The state's leaders feared that coordination would benefit only downstream states (Edwin Burritt to Dana, March 15, 1935, NRPB Records). The portions of Utah and Nevada within the Columbia Basin are small and the portions of the basin within these states were not often considered by anyone concerned with organizing a Pacific Northwest region (e.g. Bessey memorandum re. Study of Unofficial Regional Planning, April 5, 1935, NRPB Records).¹⁷

For these reasons, then, the Columbia Basin failed as a potential region. Any potential region needed to include political and economic centers, connecting them rather than dividing them from resources from which they might benefit. And despite their "illogical" spatial arrangements, state territories mattered far too much to be ignored. A region which could build lasting connections and considerable unity among human communities needed to draw on the authority and political influence of state governments and state Congressional delegations, and therefore it needed to accommodate state territories.

16. A letter from Senator C.C. Dill to Marshall Dana in 1933 noted some Canadians were talking about building a dam in the Canadian portion of the Columbia Basin even then (Dill to Dana, November 18, 1933, NRPB Records).

17. There was an effort in the 1950s to 1960s to try to develop an interstate compact for all seven states that have territory within the Columbia Basin (Doerksen 1974).

Alternative Regionalization #5 (Thematic): Four “Scientific” Geographic Regions

A fifth potential regionalization was a division proposed for the entire United States that would have cut up the four-state area of the Pacific Northwest Regional Planning Commission into four different regions within a nation-wide regional planning reorganization (figure 2.5). The advantages of this regionalization were its founding on careful study of myriad social and physical features, and its support from federal planners. Its disadvantages were that it flew in the face of any motivation for and ability to carry out political coordination at the regional level.

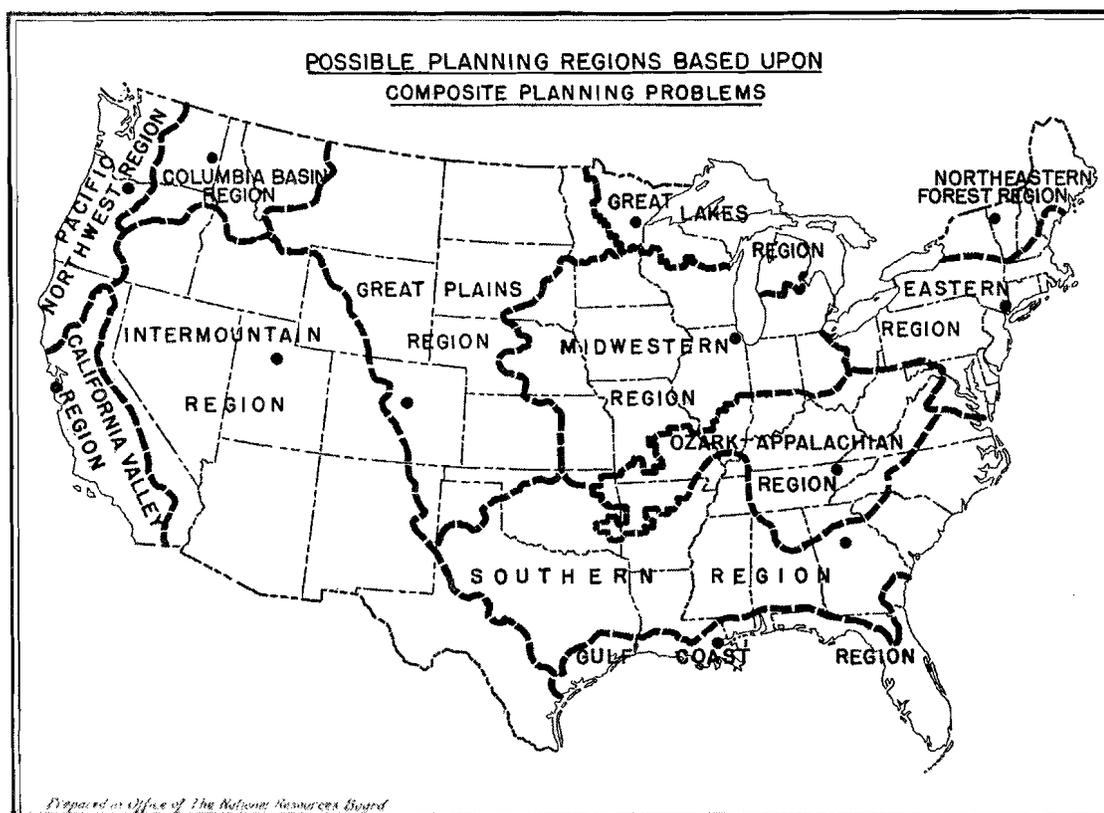


Figure 2.5. Proposed composite regions in the National Resources Committee's *Regional Factors in National Planning and Development* report. Source: NRC 1935, 166.

The source of this proposal was again the national planning agency, the Pacific Northwest Regional Planning Commission's parent agency. Re-named in mid-1935 once again, as the National Resources Committee, it prepared an extensively researched report

on regionalism, strongly informed by regionalist and regional geography scholarship, in particular the work of Howard Odum.

After going through considerable conceptual background and critical empirical analysis, the report proposed a national regionalization scheme which best grouped areas of similar and unified character. The proposal divided the four-state area of Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Montana among four other regions (figure 2.5). Only one region was contained within the four-state area: a “Columbia Basin region” encompassing most of eastern Washington, a large slice of central-northeastern Oregon, and extending to the continental divide in Montana. The other portions of the four-state area would be divided among three broad regions: a “Pacific Northwest region,” a rainy coastal strip running from northern California to the Canadian border; an “Intermountain region” which included southeastern Oregon and southern Idaho together with an area running all the way to southwest Texas; and a “Great Plains region” which would tie eastern Montana into a swath of area in the middle longitudes of the country.

It is apparent the intention was to account quite completely for the diversity of the country’s people and places, and to group regions in a way which would enable regions to address common problems (NRC 1935). But for all the good intentions, these groupings divided as much as they joined, and it was clear to many people working with real communities and resources that some interests and issues could get lost in the divisions. The proposed coastal Pacific Northwest region, for example, would have provided for ready coordination concerning coastal fisheries, the rich Douglas-Fir forests which supported a significant logging industry, and the many links among and between the communities which depended on these industries. It would not be able to tackle major issues of trade for the cities of Portland and Seattle, though, which depended so heavily on trade with the interior. Perhaps most importantly for civic and business leaders in the major cities of the proposed coastal Pacific Northwest region, it would have left them with little say over the development, or lack of development, of the Columbia River system. Bessey wrote in a confidential memo to Dana in response to a July 1935 draft of the regionalism report:

The division would cut across some of the most important planning problems of the region; notably, Columbia River development, transportation development, power development, industrial and commercial development, cultural development, and so on (Bessey memorandum to Dana, July 9, 1935, NRPB Records).

The second major problem with this regionalization was that, like a potential Columbia Basin region, it ignored state boundaries – and provided no legal rationale for federal authority either. In a resolution passed only a few weeks after Bessey wrote his memo, the PNWRPC collectively stated:

Effective state planning requires a unit of association and loyalty that is greatly weakened when the state itself is divided into separate sections, each looking to a different headquarters for its contacts with the National Resources Committee and with the federal departments.... [E]ffective state planning will be largely frustrated by any attempts so to divide a state, unless the economic and social division of the state imperatively demands such division (PNWRPC, Statement in regard to regionalization study, July 24, 1935, NRPB Records).

If this regionalization were to depend not on state authority but only the distant and distinctly non-regional federal government, it was even worse than the river basin region. There was no source of constitutional authority for the federal government to govern such “composite” regions. These regions would be left without governmental resources, institutions, or legal authority.

The final problem was that, once again, this regionalization cut through the working relationships that had been built among the PNWRPC’s four states. The PNWRPC resolution noted the importance of these established relationships: “the interrelations amongst these four states... are steadily forwarding regional unity.” (PNWRPC, Statement in regard to regionalization study, July 24, 1935, NRPB Records).

These problems wrought vehement opposition from the PNWRPC. It was to defend against the problems of this “scientific” system of regions for the Pacific Northwest that the PNWRPC would develop a thoroughly articulated, very differently laid out – and much more successful and enduring – regionalist conception of its own.

Alternative Regionalization #6: A Trade Region

The sixth potential regionalization was a trade region centered on the urban areas of Portland, Puget Sound (Seattle and Tacoma), and Spokane, perhaps Vancouver, BC, extending out to these cities' hinterlands. Potentially, such a region might include places as far away as Alaska, interior British Columbia, central Montana, southern Idaho, and southern Oregon. It derived primarily from trade practices and hopes, and in many ways was the existing dominant conception of the Pacific Northwest. Its chief advantages were that its implicit goals of increased commerce and urban growth were held by many civic and business leaders, and their ambitions were often to reinforce at least some of a trade region's geographies. But it had no clear geography, it was inherently unequal and porous, and it depended on economic exploitation of both people and natural ecosystems. Most damning in terms of practicality, it was fundamentally divisive. Trade set one city against another, one transportation route against another, and city profits against rural livelihoods.

In the depths of the Depression, civic and business leaders from Seattle, Tacoma, Portland and Spokane looked eagerly to nearby smaller cities and agricultural areas for improved production and trade. The bottom had dropped out of the Asian and East Coast trades, devastating all three port cities; depressed agriculture prices had hurt Spokane as well as the ports (NRC 1936; Spence 1990; Alwin 1997).¹⁸ If industry could be developed in the interior, if population could be recruited that might buy urban products, and if trade could be directed through these cities, then perhaps both rural and urban areas could find their way back to economic prosperity.

Abstractly, this vision might seem to fit regionalist notions well: it connected port cities, an interior gateway center, and an outlying hinterland in an interdependent economy; and it envisioned all of them working together to build a more autonomous, stable and prosperous economy. It hoped to free the broader Pacific Northwest – however

18. Seattle and silk imports from Japan provide one clear example. Silk from East Asia in the mid-1920s made up half the value of the Seattle's imports, and Seattle was the most important west coast port for silk imports (Alwin 1997: 459). Spence (1990: 389) traces a one-year 40% drop in Japanese silk exports to the U.S. directly to the stock market crash in 1929, which shrunk U.S. demand for such luxury items. Seattle was, unsurprisingly, hit hard (Alwin 1997: 459).

defined geographically – from its near-colony role as a producer and processor only of extractive commodities, and its long dependence on outside manufactures and capital.

But in truth a trade region could not have produced the social and environmental harmony imagined by regionalists. Increased production from the interior meant the conversion of rich forests, grasslands and wetlands into commodity production landscapes. When and where trade flourished, these areas were cut, drained, planted with alien species, and drastically simplified (Robbins 1997a, 1997b; Alwin 1997; Schwantes 1989; Cox 1969, 1974). And while a trade region would embrace rural communities as part of the region, its focus and energies were urban, and the goal was as much access to and control over the hinterland as anything else. Urban merchants and bankers aimed to grow rich, while farmers would grow dependent.

Planners hoped that planning could better distribute transportation and industry, prevent the overproduction that beleaguered many rural areas, and conserve natural resources with sustained yield management (NRC 1936). For a brief while in the early depression, business leaders were willing to entertain this kind of large-scale economic planning. But when it came time to hammer out the specifics, there was little agreement about what could be done. Any specific transportation routes, any focus on specific subregions for development, would inevitably favor some places over others. Reducing overproduction or “inefficient” competition would either limit the opportunities for urban profit, or increase the dependence of rural areas on one particular form of transportation, one particular inland trade center, or one particular port. The geography of a Pacific Northwest trade region was inherently contested, dynamic, and uneven in terms of benefits.

By no small coincidence, it was Oregon and especially Portland business leaders who pushed the PNWRPC to strengthen a Pacific Northwest trade region. Leaders of the Portland Chamber of Commerce led the Pacific Northwest Regional Planning Commission’s early discussions on industry and commerce and the closely related discussions about transportation (May 1934a, 1934b, 1936; May to Dana, September 28, 1934, NRPB Records; W. D. B. Dodson to Dana, September 21, 1933, NRPB Records). Unsurprisingly, in their notion of a trade region, the main avenue of commerce was the

Columbia River, and the main regional commercial node was Portland. In the second regional planning conference in December, 1934, May argued that “The economic unity of the States of Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana and Wyoming which make up [the Northwest regional economic area] is due to the fact that the Columbia River... makes possible low cost transportation extending from the heart of this region to the Pacific Ocean.” “Oregon,” he argued – which in context clearly meant Portland – was “the natural and logical channel to and through which should flow by far the greater proportion of the natural resources for processing, or the commodities manufactured, in the Columbia Basin and contiguous territory.” (May 1934a, 104)

Portland’s keen interest in claiming this regional preeminence lay in the fact that it had recently lost it, after the arrival of a transcontinental railroad to Seattle in 1893.¹⁹ Puget Sound had natural deep-water anchorages which Portland could not hope to rival, and the railroads provided just as good transportation to the interior, and indeed across the country, as did Portland’s “natural advantage,” the Columbia River. Seattle had successfully won for itself first the Alaska trade – which boomed as the Klondike gold rush began in 1897 – and then the Asian silk trade, which by the mid-1920s constituted half of the value of Seattle’s imports.²⁰ Though the silk trade had crashed after the stock market crash in 1929, Seattle still led Portland in population and economy (Alwin 1997; Abbott 1992; Meinig 1998). The Canadian Pacific’s completion in 1885 had also enabled little Vancouver to grow into a major port city, claiming for itself most of the British Columbia hinterland, whose southeastern reaches Portland had previously supplied (Barman 1996; Schwantes 1996). Railroads had also devastated the traditional Columbia Basin interior supply center, Walla Walla, with which Portland businesses were closely allied, and instead had enabled the meteoric rise of the now uncontested capital of the “Inland Empire,” Spokane. Faced with these drastic changes in economic geography, Portland and Oregon fought to find a way back to their golden age of prominence – and their hopes still rested on the Columbia River (Meinig 1998; Abbott 1992).

19. The Northern Pacific had reached Portland, with a spur to Tacoma, in 1883 (Howay, Sage, and Angus 1942; Alwin 1997; Schwantes 1989).

20. Seattle had won the China trade from California ports because it was a day closer to Asian ports; for a potentially fragile commodity like silk, this was critical (Alwin 1997).

Unsurprisingly, few others jumped on the Portland Chamber of Commerce's bandwagon to strengthen the Columbia River as the dominant trade pathway that might connect and raise up the region. Despite the fact that trade and commerce were fundamental to the economy of almost every city and town in any possible Pacific Northwest region, and central to many conceptions of a coherent Pacific Northwest, the "economics" sections of the Pacific Northwest Regional Planning Conferences drew few attendees (Stewart 1936; Keezer 1934). People from different states and cities worked together instead on policies and programs they could agree upon: boosting investment and production, developing natural resources, and building transportation infrastructure in any and all directions. Discussions about the Columbia River drew wide-ranging interest only when they focused on the river as a resource which could be developed in multiple locations, and its benefits then transported in multiple directions (PNWRPC 1934b).

The simple truth was that trade – while a key part of what everyone had in mind when they imagined the interconnections within a Pacific Northwest region – could not in fact hold a region together. In late 1935, the Pacific Northwest Regional Planning Commission would declare that "an economic system based upon the principle of private enterprise" was in fact the greatest antagonist to "regional community feeling" (NRC 1936, 130).

CRYSTALLIZING A REGION: THE COLUMBIA RIVER'S PACIFIC NORTHWEST

Six alternative regionalizations. All had advantages and disadvantages, important inclusions and inevitable exclusions. The PNWRPC sat in the middle of the maelstrom of the pulls and pushes for and against these regionalizations, and initially had little interest in defining its region's territory or character in any limiting way. But by late 1935 it would develop its own clear, well-articulated conception of the Pacific Northwest region that was distinct from any of the six alternatives: a regionalist, Columbia River-centered, three-and-a-half-state Pacific Northwest (figure 2.6). How and why did the PNWRPC develop this regional conception? What were its practical advantages that gave it lasting

power the others did not have? And what, in the end, would this more enduring regionalization mean for who and what was included, what would be its emphases and goals?

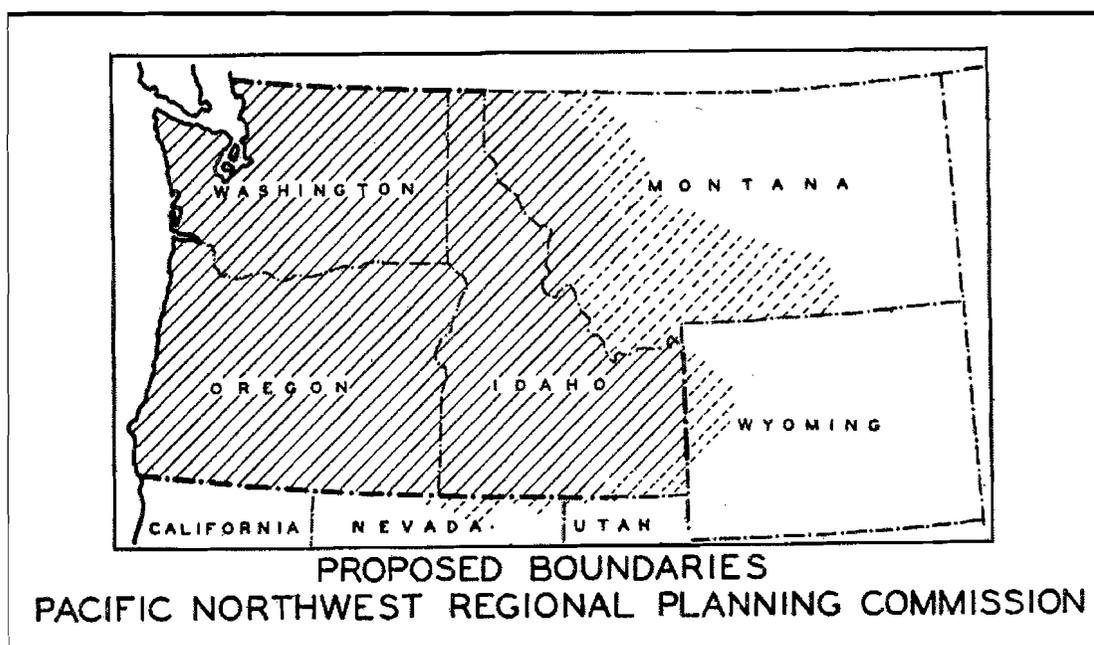


Figure 2.6. A Columbia River's Pacific Northwest. *Source:* NRC 1936, 104.

The Columbia River's Pacific Northwest grew precisely out of the push for several of the alternative Pacific Northwest regionalizations. It was an amalgam of the four-state, Columbia Basin, trade-based, and "scientific" regionalizations. It emerged out of conflict – conflict over the proper regionalization for the Pacific Northwest.

The central players in this conflict were the regional and national planners. On one side, the PNWRPC tried to build an inclusive vision and wide network of working relationships to further the economic and social ambitions of civic, political and business leaders of its four states, and increasingly, to further its own institutional authority. It saw Columbia River development as an essential, though not at first defining, part of these ambitions and its own planning authority. On the other side, national planners, often responding to mandates from the Roosevelt administration or Congress, repeatedly sent down to their regional subsidiary studies and reorganizational proposals and directives

which threatened to break up the networks of coordination the PNWRPC had established, or to take away from the PNWRPC the responsibility for Columbia River planning. The PNWRPC was expected to cooperate, but as its leaders gained confidence, they became increasingly vocal in opposing threatening directives. Their rhetorical and political strategy was to defend the PNWRPC's institutional legitimacy and its members' desired networks of influence with an increasingly well-articulated regional conception of their own.

The Columbia River's Pacific Northwest developed in stages, as the PNWRPC faced three threats from national planners against its turf and its member states' ambitions. In each case the PNWRPC found and used opportunities to overcome these threats within the framework of national planners' own rhetoric and political support. The result was an increasingly clearly articulated regional conception that won the PNWRPC strong support from the FDR administration, and considerable influence over federal policy in the Pacific Northwest.

Both threats and opportunities came in the forms of several of the alternative Pacific Northwest regionalizations. The details of these alternatives have already been described. Here the point is to understand the ways they, and the political and policy contexts in which they were advanced, contributed to a new, clearly articulated, more lasting regionalization, the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest.

Finding regional unity to retain Montana

The first threat was the three-state Pacific Northwest region of Washington, Oregon and Idaho. When in March, 1934, the Public Works Administration and the National Planning Board announced a reorganization of regional districts, placing Washington, Oregon and Idaho in District Number 11, and Montana with the Dakotas in a new District Number 8, it had evoked protest (Dana to H. M. Waite, March 16, 1934, NRPB Records; G. H. Clapp to Dana, April 10, 1934, NRPB Records; PNWRPC, Minutes, August 11, 1934, NRPB Records references a March Montana resolution) but resulted in little change. The PNWRPC continued to meet as a four-state commission (PNWRPC, Minutes, August 11, 1934, NRPB Records). The transition in the national

planning agency from the National Planning Board to the National Resources Board in June (Roosevelt 1934) probably aided the PNWRPC's cause during this time, as the focus for national planners was on their own internal institutional transformation.

In August 1934, though, with the transition to the National Resources Board complete, the re-districting suddenly began to matter. A new national Water Resources Committee, coordinating closely with the National Resources Board, began a nation-wide inventory of water resources. A Pacific Northwest regional consultant would study the Columbia Basin. This consultant would not be working with Montana officials. To make matters worse, the Water Resources Committee would not even hire a consultant for the Missouri Basin, as the national committee had grown out of a Mississippi Valley Committee and it therefore felt competent to compile Missouri Basin data and recommendations (J. S. James to Morris Cooke, August 17, 1934, NRPB Records; Charles W. Charles Eliot, Bulletin C, Water Resources Inventory and Plan, August 4, 1934, NRPB Records). Montana's input, in other words, would be entirely left out of the national study.

This time the protest from Montana and the PNWRPC was much greater. The four-state PNWRPC passed a long and articulate resolution in its August 1934 monthly meeting stating that Montana was still considered part of the Pacific Northwest commission, and that any Columbia Basin resource study should follow the outer boundaries of the four Pacific Northwest states. The regional commission re-emphasized this point to a broad public by publishing a summary of this resolution in its new monthly newsletter, the *Planning News* (PNWRPC, Planning News Article (3), 1934, NRPB Records). The Montana representative to the PNWRPC followed with a pointed letter to the Water Resources Committee chair (J. S. James to Morris Cooke, August 17, 1934, NRPB Records).

It was in these responses that the PNWRPC began to develop a clear notion of regional identity and interconnection, with the Columbia River as one among several regional connectors. As described in the section on the potential three-state Pacific Northwest, PNWRPC archives suggest that Montanans and their neighbors to the West all had self-interested motives to want to keep Montana in the Pacific Northwest regional

council. But these motivations were not the ones that were emphasized in August and September letters and memos arguing against the split. Seeking compelling arguments that might persuade distant Washington D.C. planners, the commission justified its four-state membership based on regional unity. To do this, the PNWRPC had to develop a clearer sense of the Pacific Northwest as a unified region, and of the factors that unified it. In its August resolution, the commission argued that Montana, especially western Montana, shared major industries such as forestry and mining with the three states to its west. Most of Montana's trade was to the west, through Oregon and Washington ports. Tying them all together was the Columbia River; its energy even crossed the continental divide into eastern Montana. With the Dakotas, Montana shared only agriculture and water resources. Clearly Montana's "predominant interests" were with the Pacific Northwest (PNWRPC, Minutes, August 11, 1934, NRPB Records).

This sense of connection through shared industry, trade geographies, and the Columbia River was the beginning of the conception of the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest.

The Pacific Northwest claims the Columbia

The development toward the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest was soon furthered in another way by the same water resources study. The water resources study's organizing focus offered another regionalization which held out much more promise for the PNWRPC: the Columbia Basin. But again, opportunity came with another threat – and it was the threat which galvanized the PNWRPC to develop a well-articulated argument that the Columbia River was the defining feature of the Pacific Northwest region.

The PNWRPC of course had been from its very beginnings brought together in part around shared interest in Columbia River development. But as the commission under Dana's leadership took on its role as a regional planning institution, it did not limit its focus to the river. There were outside influences, though – especially from the federal government – which made a Columbia River focus particularly promising. Most important was interest from President Roosevelt and Congress in the idea of a Columbia

Valley Authority (CVA), an agency that would have been a Columbia Basin version of the Tennessee Valley Authority. Though the precise geography of a CVA may have been unclear (e.g. Dana and Bessey memorandum to PNWRPC Members, January 22, 1935, NRPB Records emphasize it should include Puget Sound) its geographical focus on the Columbia Basin was a large part of its political appeal. Still, as the earliest CVA proposals went forward, the Pacific Northwest Regional Planning Commission seemed to hold back. The initial thinking seems to have been that if a CVA were created, it could do its own planning, as the TVA was doing. The first CVA bill drafts were crafted by Senator C. C. Dill in late 1933 without consultation with the Pacific Northwest Regional Planning Commission (Dana to Charles W. Eliot, December 18, 1933, NRPB Records). These were not, however, introduced to Congress.²¹

Despite early support, a CVA turned out to be more controversial than the TVA had been.²² As 1933 wore on to 1934, a CVA remained only an idea, not a reality. Facing this holdup, Roosevelt called for studies and recommendations which would precede any legislation to create a CVA or another form of federal agency for the Columbia Basin. To the Pacific Northwest Regional Planning Commission, broad preliminary studies and recommendations were, unlike a CVA itself, clearly the business of a planning commission, and they quickly began brainstorming and making suggestions about how a plan should be developed (Dana to C. C. Dill, November 29, 1933, NRPB Records; Bessey to E. F. Banker, April 11, 1934, NRPB Records; Authority for Federal Plant and/or CVA 1934, NRPB Records). In August 1934, President Roosevelt came to the Northwest to visit the new Columbia River dam sites. During his stay, Roosevelt met with Marshall Dana and brought up the idea of a comprehensive study and plan that might pave the way for a CVA (Dana to Dern, August 9, 1934, NRPB Records; McKinley 1952). While Roosevelt may not have specified that the Pacific Northwest

21. The secondary sources which recount the history of CVA proposals (McKinley 1952; Voeltz 1960; Lang 2001; Ogden 1949) do not mention the 1933 draft CVA bills prepared by Senator Dill. These bills seem not to have been circulated, perhaps because of the early concerns raised from Portland, states, and existing federal agencies (Dana to Dill, November 29, 1933, NRPB Records; Amedee Smith to Dana, December 1, 1933, NRPB Records; PNWRPC, Minutes, 1934, NRPB Records). See Chapter 3 on how these kinds of concerns shaped the Bonneville Project Act.

22. The CVA generated opposition from several quarters even in the Pacific Northwest, which would doom it through several rounds of proposed bills – in the early New Deal, in 1936-9, and in the late 1940s. I analyze this opposition, and how it led to the compromise Bonneville Power Administration in 1937, in Chapter 3.

Regional Planning Commission would take the lead on such a study, Dana seems to have inferred that likelihood (Dana to Arthur Morgan, August 15, 1934, NRPB Records). Within a few days of Dana's meeting with Roosevelt, the National Resources Board announced its water resources inventory (Charles W. Charles Eliot, Bulletin C, Water Resources Inventory and Plan, August 4, 1934, NRPB Records). The PNWRPC naturally assumed that it would play a leading role in data compilation and analysis for the Columbia Basin portion of the report. At the same time that the commission's members argued for Montana's inclusion in the Columbia Basin portion of the study, its staff hurried to put together data and offered the regional consultant office space as well as considerable support (Dana to Jacobs, August 15, 1934, NRPB Records; Bessey to Major Joseph T. Jacobs, August 13, 1934, NRPB Records, Bessey telegraph to Charles W. Eliot, August 7, 1934, NRPB Records, Bessey to Charles W. Eliot, August 7, 1934, NRPB Records, Bessey, Report to PNWRPC, August 11, 1934, NRPB Records). But the consultant, Joseph Jacobs, faced a tight timeline from his Washington D.C. bosses (Jacobs to Thorndike Saville, August 11, 1934, NRPB Records), and a directive to keep his report confidential so as to "avoid a misunderstanding and controversy" (Jacobs to Dana, September 18, 1934, NRPB Records). It seems that the Water Resources Committee wanted to avoid the political influence that could be brought to bear by well-connected state and regional officials. When pressed by Dana and others on the PNWRPC, Jacobs went further: the Water Resources Committee was not actually a part of the National Resources Board. The two worked on water and land, respectively. Thus the state and regional subsidiaries of the National Resources Board such as the Pacific Northwest Regional Planning Commission and its member state planning boards were also to work on land planning, not water planning (Jacobs to Dana, September 18, 1934, NRPB Records). Planning for the Columbia River, that is, was simply not a part of the PNWRPC's job.

The PNWRPC reacted at first with incredulity that its perspective and expertise were not sought, and then with increasingly vociferous memos and letters. Bessey put together a pointed and articulate memo, with specific critiques of the Water Resource Committee's report. He perhaps could not attack directly the administrative division of

responsibility between the National Resources Board and the Water Resources Committee that evidently divided water and land planning. Instead, he invoked principles of grass-roots governance and political inclusion. He emphasized that the exclusion of local, state, regional and even federal agency field staff input was foolish. This approach would “tend to develop plans and policies which will not be fully balanced and fully comprehensive due to the lack of consideration and representation of ... important interests” and would “tend to foster jealousies and friction through failure to recognize sources of information other than from Washington D.C.” (Bessey memorandum to Dana, September 20, 1934, NRPB Records). Dana forwarded Bessey’s memo to NRC Director Eliot and Idaho Senator Pope, who was close with the President (Dana to Charles W. Eliot Re: water inventory, September 24, 1934, NRPB Records; Dana to J. P. Pope , September 21, 1934, NRPB Records).

But the Pacific Northwest commission leaders soon recognized that the water resources inventory was a short and preliminary effort. Jacobs completed his report in a month, and it was compiled into a national land and water study with little specific analysis of the Columbia Basin (NRB 1934). The PNWRPC members and staff realized that there was still room, and likely political support, for a much broader study of the basin that might precede CVA legislation. This would be a tremendous opportunity – if they could secure it. Even as the Water Resources Committee report was being completed, Bessey put together another 12-page paper, this time outlining the regional planning commission’s water resources program. He pointed out that the Columbia River Basin was nearly coincident with the commission’s region; and that the commission had already developed deep expertise and myriad working contacts. The implication was clear: for all these reasons, the Pacific Northwest Regional Planning Commission was the obvious choice, the only real choice, for any major Columbia River study (Bessey, Water Resources Planning Programs of the Pacific Northwest, October 12, 1934, NRPB Records). Bessey followed this a month later with a 12-page outline of the report that might result from a more comprehensive PNWRPC study of the Columbia Basin (Bessey, Preliminary Study for a Columbia Valley Authority, November 12, 1934, NRPB Records).

With this, the Pacific Northwest Regional Planning Commission fully embraced its new *raison d'être*: Columbia River planning not simply as something it *could* do, but rather something central to its mission and identity. To justify this, Bessey had asserted not only the PNWRPC's institutional claims to Columbia River planning, but the Pacific Northwest region's claims to the Columbia River. Because of the geographic similarity between the Columbia Basin and the Pacific Northwest – the PNWRPC's four-state Pacific Northwest, that is, of course – and because of the fundamental principles of democratic participation and representation, the region's people and governments had superior understanding that could and should inform analysis, and they had a special right to participate in Columbia River planning.

Soon after the water resources inventory was compiled and published as a part of a national resources study in December, 1934 (NRB 1934), the Pacific Northwest Regional Planning Commission finally got the recognition and directive it sought. In January, 1935, Roosevelt called for a full study to precede a possible CVA, and specified that it should be done by the Pacific Northwest Regional Planning Commission (Dana memorandum to President re. Columbia Valley Ten-Year Plan, February 6, 1935, NRPB Records).

Regionalism compels a region

The PNWRPC now had something close to a clear conception of the Pacific Northwest region. The regional conception included a clear geography, character, and purpose – and these were increasingly linked to the Columbia River. The Pacific Northwest was the four states of Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Montana, unified as a region by common industry, trade and the Columbia River. Pacific Northwest-wide, *regional* analysis and planning allowed for full democratic participation and comprehensive consideration of all important interests. The region advanced a claim over Columbia River analysis and planning based on the region's new-found superior capability and purpose, as well as the geographic proximity between region and river basin.

These elements would crystallize into a fully articulated vision of a Columbia River-centered Pacific Northwest – in the end with eastern Montana split off into a Great Plains or Missouri Basin region, leaving the Pacific Northwest with only three and a half states – in response to a third and final threat to the commission. Just as had the three-state regionalization, this third threat came within a report that also offered an opportunity. The threat was the four “scientific” regions, the report was the National Resources Committee’s regionalism report, and the opportunity was to use the methods and ideas of regionalism and regional planning to legitimize the commission’s preferred regional territory and its claims to Columbia River planning.

The impetus for the National Resources Committee’s regionalism report – published in its final form in December 1935 as *Regional Factors in National Planning and Development* (NRC 1935) – was both practical and ideological. First, the National Resources Committee recognized that many natural resource development needs and challenges crossed state boundaries and it needed a way to coordinate and plan on a subnational, but inter-state basis. Second, inspired by regionalist scholarship, the National Resources Committee suggested that supporting regional institutions, and regional organization of resource, economic and social development, could support both a rich cultural diversity and strong civic involvement:

Recently, [regionalism]... has been recognized as a factor of value and importance in the encouragement of a more varied and a richer life for the Nation, whereby the peculiar characteristics, resources, and contributions of the major sections of the country...could be protected.... The very stimulation of the self-consciousness of the section may recruit a wider leadership for civic affairs, and a richer culture....” (NRC 1935, 8)

In other words, this report marked a strong endorsement and embracing of regionalist ideas and ideals by federal planners – and behind the planners, by the Roosevelt administration.

Its analyses drew heavily on the methods of regionalists and regionalist geographers – in particular, those of Howard Odum. The report’s proposed “composite” regions were based on analyses of dozens of social and physical factors that varied across the United States’ vast territory (NRC 1935).

The good news for the PNWRPC was that the PNWRPC's complaints about lack of input into the water resources inventory had clearly had an effect. This time, national planners offered ample opportunity for regional planners to provide input. As part of the regionalism study group's investigation, it sent out a survey to the TVA, the PNWRPC, and other regional planning institutions, asking about their experience with regional planning (Jacob Crane, Notes on Study of Unofficial Regional Planning, March 23, 1935, NRPB Records).²³ Then, between May and July, 1935, the report's main preparer, Jacob Crane, Jr. circulated increasingly complete outlines and finally a full draft of the report. It was in these drafts that the study group introduced its proposed national regionalization system, initially proposed as a set of planning centers that might coordinate somewhat flexible areas (Research Committee on Regional Factors in National Planning and Development, Draft Summary Report, June 11, 1935, NRPB Records).²⁴

This proposal threatened the commission's newly found *raison d'être*, for it split the Columbia Basin into western and eastern sections, and dismembered the commission itself. It was this – far more than the intensive scholarship and analysis behind it – that motivated reaction from the PNWRPC. In an internal memo written to Dana, Bessey was outspoken. “Something should be done at once to kill the (to my mind) absurd planning region and center proposal... of the preliminary report of the committee on regional study.... This conclusion should be reviewed before it reaches many people and before it gets set in their minds” (Bessey memorandum to Dana, July 9, 1935, NRPB Records).

But as they had done with the water resources report, PNWRPC staff made their case not by asserting their self-interest but rather by appealing to the goals and using the

23. Even in response to this early survey, PNWRPC staff and members seemed already to be bracing for self-defense. They emphasized the advantages of the institutional arrangement of the Pacific Northwest Regional Planning Commission, with its state representation and federal support for planning. All said that Washington, Oregon, Idaho and at least western Montana were part of the Pacific Northwest, many noting the close correspondence of this territory to the United States portion of the Columbia Basin, and also to major trade and communication routes throughout the area (Henny to Dana, April 3, 1935, NRPB Records; Tiffany to Bessey, April 4, 1935, NRPB Records 1935; Bessey memorandum re. Study of Unofficial Regional Planning, April 5, 1935, NRPB Records; Comments on outline for study of regional planning, April, 1935, NRPB Records).

24. Although Crane's regionalism study group proposed a specific regionalism, and although it emphasized the benefits of regional planning, it also showed sophisticated and nuanced insights into the complexities of finding ideal regions for planning. It was much less confident than the Pacific Northwest commission that regional boundaries could be delineated easily. The group argued that although river basins sometimes work as nuclei for planning regions, they would not work in most cases. Still, it held out the hope – despite its own strong contrary evidence – that regional scientists would yet find a fully satisfying and inclusive way to divide territory into regions (NRC 1935).

reasoning of the national planners. Here, that meant embracing and using the ideas and methods of the regionalism report. The very next day, Bessey wrote a more measured letter to Dana, praising the high-quality scholarship the regionalism study group had used; and it was this more measured letter that Dana forwarded to the National Resources Committee leadership (Dana to Charles W. Eliot, July 11, 1935, NRPB Records, Dana to Charles E. Merriam, July 11, 1935, NRPB Records). Bessey emphasized that the regionalism study group had done an excellent job putting together considerable research and thought, and provided thorough and important analysis. Bessey engaged directly with the logic of the group's use of regional geography analysis. Although its data and analysis were excellent, he wrote, its conclusion about suggested regions leaned far too heavily on land and "geographic" – i.e. physiographic – considerations. He suggested a list of "acknowledged factors in regionalization" that should be weighed more heavily, including the present accepted definition of regions, political divisions, economic structure and metropolitan influence. He suggested that it is better not to divide states if it can be avoided. Finally, he "disagree[d] with the statement... that the drainage basin is the worst of all possible planning divisions." Rather, he argued, "In the mountainous and arid west, particularly, drainage systems have a rather strong general unifying effect. As admitted in the report, the hydro-electric power development and use problem is a particularly unifying one in the Pacific Northwest" (Bessey to Dana - confidential, July 10, 1935, NRPB Records).

Coincidentally, in the same month, July 1935, that the PNWRPC received the full draft of the regionalism report, it received the official assignment of the Columbia Basin Study from Interior Secretary Ickes; indeed Ickes' letter of assignment explicitly asked for the PNWRPC's input on the draft regionalism report as well (Ickes to Dana, July 8, 1935, NRPB Records). The July 24, 1935 PNWRPC meeting dealt with both reports. The PNWRPC accepted the Columbia Basin Study assignment happily, saying it would:

prepare a study and report which will contain a review of the present assets of the Columbia Basin and adjoining and related territory with respect to both natural and human resources; of economic and social conditions and trends; of governmental organization – federal, state and local – concerned with the conservation and development of these

resources...Upon this factual base [it would] formulate and recommend plans and policies for permanent Federal participation with the people of the Pacific Northwest with respect to the conservation and development of resources and the planning, construction and operation of public works, in the region (Bessey, Minutes of PNWRPC meeting, July 24, 1935, NRPB Records).

The commission's response to the regionalism study was less enthusiastic, though respectful:

[T]he four chairmen of the planning commissions and councils of these states... do respectfully urge...our profound and considered conviction that the area drained by the Columbia River, and its tributaries extending into all four of the Pacific Northwestern states, comprises a social and economic unit that ought not to be divided or torn apart; that so to do will be found highly destructive of that unity which should be the first purpose of sound regional planning (Bessey, Minutes of PNWRPC meeting, July 24, 1935, NRPB Records).

The most significant comments, though, concerned how the Columbia Basin Study might be used to challenge the regionalization proposed by the new regionalism report. Reed College political science professor Charles McKinley, who had become a key consultant for the PNWRPC, said:

It seems to me that this question will become, inevitably, one of the main centers of the study that will be launched for the Columbia Basin. In any organization for planning, construction and operation of public works we must be concerned with regional boundaries. The questions of planning and development cannot be answered without answering this question of definition of regional areas (Bessey, Minutes of PNWRPC meeting, July 24, 1935, NRPB Records).

McKinley, in other words, proposed to add a whole new section to the Columbia Basin Study, focused on defining the Pacific Northwest region. As McKinley was articulating this strategy, Bessey had already figured out something of this section's content and conclusions. Bessey said that the Columbia Basin Study would supplement the regionalism study, and would "include, undoubtedly, analyses of the Pacific Northwest as an unusually well defined area from the standpoints of economy, planning,

conservation and development” (Bessey, Minutes of PNWRPC meeting, July 24, 1935, NRPB Records).

The PNWRPC, under McKinley’s leadership, then proceeded to conduct its own thorough, independent analysis of Pacific Northwest regionalism; this would become one of the three major sections of the Columbia Basin Study, entitled “Definition and Regionality of the Pacific Northwest.” The section paralleled the analysis of the regionalism study. Myriad characteristics were mapped over the four-state Pacific Northwest and beyond, showing a complex array of overlapping characteristics. But the PNWRPC argued that different factors should be emphasized in tests of regional “homogeneity” from those used by the regionalism study group. The commission built on Bessey’s critique of the regionalism study group’s over-emphasis on “geographic” features, to advance a definition of “regional homogeneity” which more resembled the definition of functional regions that preeminent regional geographer Richard Hartshorne would soon introduce (Hartshorne 1939). The PNWRPC emphasized, above all, interconnections of trade:

To the geographer the term seems particularly to mean sameness in character of land and physiographic features. Behind this idea lies the belief that sameness in land characteristics requires similarity of use and cultural habits growing out of land use....

Let us notice certain qualifications to this perhaps oversimplified view... Here we find the economist’s notion that homogeneity tends to develop where there is intensity of economic intercourse. Constant contact between people living in areas quite distinct in the character of land and its use may develop because of economic specialization. This requires reciprocity between the areas. One furnishes a market for the other. One fabricates the raw materials of the other or acts as a collecting agency for export... Even nature...presents features that tie two otherwise dissimilar areas together. When a great river, like the Columbia , cuts through a mountain barrier, separating two areas that differ greatly in the character of climate and land, it furnishes a tie that links the two together (NRC 1936, 99).

The report argued that the best notion of the Pacific Northwest would include all of Oregon and Washington, western Montana, and all of Idaho or all except the southeast corner. This area formed a surprisingly “homogeneous” region. This was supported by

empirical evidence of similar industries throughout this region, especially forestry; social interconnections as evidenced by vehicle and phone traffic between towns and cities in this territory; the business links of banks and mail-order businesses that linked to Seattle, Portland and Spokane from throughout the region; and the readership of newspapers which similarly centered in those three cities. The region was also, as suggested in the report's argument about regional homogeneity, linked by the Columbia River – a major arterial for transportation (even railroads and roads follow its course, noted the report), a source of irrigation, and a promising source of future hydropower. By implication, even areas within the three and a half states physically outside the Columbia Basin, such as Puget Sound, were linked to the basin because they were or would be linked with the river's transportation systems, irrigation, and potential hydropower (NRC 1936).

The report allowed for some nuanced senses of region that went well beyond what the regional commission would have acknowledged a year earlier. Outlying areas were recognized, and allowed double regional membership. Eastern Montana was clearly different from the Pacific Northwest. Southeastern Idaho was culturally much more linked to Salt Lake City, and both southern Idaho and southeastern Oregon were agriculturally allied with the Great Basin. But even southeastern Idaho was linked to the Pacific Northwest because of the Snake River, tributary to the Columbia (NRC 1936).

But the commission argued that, despite these mixed linkages, states should be allowed membership in regional planning organizations as units. Montana thus should have representation in both Pacific Northwest and Great Plains regional planning. Idaho and Oregon needed to be included in the Pacific Northwest, but for some issues, they should also be able to be involved in Great Basin planning. Wyoming should be allowed input in some cases (NRC 1936).

Thus it was that a conception of the Pacific Northwest became crystallized. With the completion of the Columbia Basin Study in late 1935, the Pacific Northwest Regional Planning Commission committed itself to a clear definition of the Pacific Northwest as a three-and-a-half-state area, defined and united by the Columbia River.

By fall, as the PNWRPC reviewed the final drafts of what would soon be published as the *Regional Factors in National Planning* report (NRC 1935), Dana could

point to the extensive analysis in the Columbia Basin Study, itself now almost completed. (Dana to Charles W. Eliot, Re. Report on Regional Factors in National Planning and Development, October 29, 1935, NRPB Records). And by then, the PNWRPC's efforts had clearly had some effect on the national regionalism study. Crane wrote directly to Dana to emphasize that the report no longer delineated regions; instead, it said regions needed to be flexible so they could move depending on the problem. There might be possibilities of split representation, he wrote; he mentioned Montana in particular as needing representation in both the Pacific Northwest Regional Planning Commission and the Missouri Basin commission. Crane also was respectful of the Pacific Northwest Commission's insistence on inclusion of states and existing regional organizations, as well as the commission's recommendations that federal agencies have some representation in regional bodies (Jacob Crane, In Conclusion, September 3, 1935, NRPB Records).

But by 1936, the PNWRPC's success in influencing the regionalism report hardly mattered. The regionalism report has earned admiration from decades of scholars (perhaps most recently, Meinig 2004), but it seems to have had little influence on subsequent national planning and policy – and certainly little in any of the possible Pacific Northwests. The Columbia Basin Study, on the other hand, had major and direct influence.

Inclusions and Exclusions, Advantages and Continuing Fractures in the Three-and-a-Half-State, Columbia River's Pacific Northwest

The Columbia River's Pacific Northwest was, in the end, an amalgam of the four-state, Columbia Basin, trade-based, and "scientific" regionalizations. By blending all of these, the PNWRPC effectively maximized the inclusions and practical advantages of their resulting region.

By centering the region's identity on the Columbia River, the PNWRPC was able to obtain most of the advantages of a possible Columbia Basin region. It could draw the support of the Roosevelt administration and the interest of Congress. It could make use of the river basin-wide development plans of the Army Corps of Engineers. It could build

on the enthusiasm of navigation boosters and the visionaries of the Inland Empire who dreamed of lush irrigated farmland. It could avail itself of the eagerness – and the considerable financial and political resources – of the civic and business leaders of Portland and Spokane, the cities nearest the two Columbia River dams now being built, and even of Seattle and Tacoma, where leaders hoped to receive Columbia River hydropower through a regional transmission system. With a Columbia River-centered regional identity, the PNWRPC could invoke the kind of broader social purpose and wise conservation of resources imagined by advocates of a CVA. Finally, it could trust that if a federal agency of some sort were created along its region's geographical lines, that the agency's authority would likely be upheld in court.

A Columbia Basin focus also helped invoke the legitimacy of regionalism and planning, even if the authors of the *Regional Factors in National Planning* report were dubious about using river basins to organize regions. The PNWRPC made sure it could retain that legitimacy by using the methods and incorporating the logic – and challenging the logic, as necessary – of the national planners' proposed “scientific” regions. The Columbia Basin theme helped the commission's key thinkers, Bessey and McKinley, to find an organizing principle they could point to as encompassing a region that national planners should respect.

Bessey and McKinley also drew on regionalist concepts and methods to legitimize the ways their region diverged from the geography of the Columbia Basin. The PNWRPC added to the Columbia Basin the missing corners of Washington, Oregon and Idaho in order to gain the essential support and cooperation of Washington and Puget Sound government, civic and business leaders – and justified it based on the principle that “regional planning areas ought to do as little violence as possible to the integrity of State and local governments” (NRC 1936, 96). The Columbia Basin Study argued against the divisions proposed by the national regionalism study group by emphasizing the connections of the Columbia River and trade. Thus, the themes of the four-state Pacific Northwest region and the trade-based region helped justify important extensions beyond the boundaries of hydrology.

Although the PNWRPC's embrace of regionalism was strategic, it was not simply utilitarian and selfish. The PNWRPC had begun with a notion of broad social welfare, expansion of prosperity for all, a commitment to rural as well as urban areas, and a dedication to conservation of resources and scenic areas. Following Marshall Dana's contacts and inclinations, the commission had also from the beginning promoted wide participation of state and local governments, and of business and civic groups. When the commission had been threatened by alternative federal regionalizations, it had transformed state and local participation into principles of grass-roots democracy and federalism. Now all of these ideals were bundled into the identity of the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest.²⁵

Even at its most inclusive and optimistic, though, the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest was never all-inclusive. Its exclusions derived both from simple geography – that is, where the regional boundaries were drawn – and from the ideas, assumptions, goals and relationships which were embedded in that geography – that is, the content the regional boundaries were understood to encompass, and the goals those boundaries were built to support. In terms of simple geographical boundaries, the Columbia River-centered Pacific Northwest's focus on the Columbia Basin privileged land-based river hydrology, for example, at the expense of water-based salmon migration that might incorporate Alaskan and British Columbia fishermen and oceanic ecologies. Its three-and-a-half-state trade geography focused on Seattle, Tacoma and Portland as ports for the interior hinterlands, not on improving inland areas' access to ports to *their* east, north or south – nor did it consider the access of ports elsewhere in the Pacific Rim, from Vancouver to Tokyo, that might also have wished for improved trade with interior Washington, Oregon, Idaho and western Montana. The fact that the three-and-a-half-state Pacific Northwest of the Pacific Northwest Regional Planning Commission was not, in fact, geographically the same as the Columbia River basin meant that while people and businesses based in the hydrologically separate Puget Sound had major influence on the

25. Bessey and McKinley would continue to promote ideas of regionalism in the Pacific Northwest region for several more decades. Their writings would from this point onward hold that the Pacific Northwest was the three-and-a-half-state area delineated in the Columbia Basin Study, unified by the Columbia River, and would also show a concern for finding a way for this area to work together for broad social benefit and purpose (see most notably McKinley 1952; Bessey 1963). See also Chapters 3 and 4.

planning and development of the Columbia River basin, those within the large portion of the basin that lay over the international border in Canada had very little.

Even within the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest, all places and all interests were not equal. First, the Columbia River theme was not about the kind of bioregional vision of the river system often espoused today. Three major factors which today might be considered "environmental" were part of the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest regional vision: continued production of salmon, protection of scenic areas, and conservation of natural resources for long-term sustained use. But salmon production from hatcheries was seen as just as good as river production; scenic area protection focused only on particular sites for recreation, not some broad sense of ecosystem preservation; and conservation of natural resources included damming rivers so that their waters could be used repeatedly, when human needs were greatest. Wild plants and animals, natural fluvial processes, Native American fishermen long ago pushed to inland reservations – none of these were part of the Columbia Basin vision. Other issues – whether forest conservation, urban versus rural development, or expanded trade – were analyzed either for their effect on Columbia River dams and their benefits, or else as possible beneficiaries of Columbia River development.

Nor was the Columbia River's region aimed at addressing fundamental economic divides. Though there was hope that the products of Columbia River dams might be spread out throughout the basin to widely dispersed communities, and to people of all classes and vocations – and this hope would eventually be realized to a considerable extent – there was no real interest in fundamental changes in political-economic structures or economic geographies that might enable, for example, greater rural self-sufficiency or political power. And if there was little stomach for addressing the basic structures of class and geographic inequalities, there was not even any real notice of gender or racial or other sorts of divides. The commission tapped the reigning elite – government agencies, scholars, business leaders, prominent civic leaders – and it was their interests and concerns, including their notions of social and environmental well-being, which were embedded in the vision of the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest.

The biggest practical problem was that even though the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest was the regionalization which was ultimately embraced by the PNWRPC, it had its own set of fractures, its own debilitating problems. It encompassed multiple jurisdictions: four states, the federal government, and multiple cities and towns. Getting these unified in a common vision was not always so easy. In addition, private businesses, even in the Depression, still had considerable power, and they did not always support government intervention in resource development. Even the goal of Columbia River development would soon divide almost as much as it unified, as differing visions of development were hammered out into actual policy and practice. Southern Idaho and Montana – and much of eastern Washington and Oregon – were more concerned about irrigation than about hydropower and flood control, and they were concerned from the start that cheap hydropower would not subsidize affordable irrigation, and that downstream hydropower would soon make claims on upstream water. These would in many ways prove to be insurmountable conflicts of interest.

As shown by the difficulties with a trade region, common purpose was found mainly in shared aspirations for federally funded new resource development. The question now was how far this, plus the ideals now embedded in the conception of the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest and the working relationships put into practice by the PNWRPC, could go in unifying this region and in achieving its broad ideals and visions.

The Conceptual Legacy of the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest

After minor edits in December (Bessey, Minutes of PNWRPC meeting, March 2, 1935, NRPB Records), the Columbia Basin Study was published by the National Resources Committee in January 1936, as *Regional Planning, Part I -- Pacific Northwest* (NRC 1936). Today this is an obscure volume gathering dust on library shelves, and outside Columbia River policy-making circles and debates, its notion of the Pacific Northwest region is once again contested. The Pacific Northwest has once again become a region variously defined, mapped, and imagined.

But for two to three decades after the publication of the Columbia Basin Study, it was a major reference work on the Pacific Northwest region; and it was while the PNWRPC's conception of the Pacific Northwest region remained dominant – and Bessey and McKinley were still leading thinkers and consultants on Pacific Northwest regional development – that the main physical, institutional and political transformations of Columbia River development would take place. The legacies of their regional conception continue. Chapters 3 and 4 cover the early shaping of the PNWRPC's most important institutional legacy and heir, the Bonneville Power Administration, which put many of the ideas of the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest into practice. The PNWRPC's *ideas* about the Pacific Northwest region had their own direct influence, though, as well, framing the conceptions, analyses, and dreams about the Pacific Northwest for decades. We have inherited our ideas of Pacific Northwest region – de-historicized though they have become – in part from the direct intellectual influence of the PNWRPC's conception of the Columbia River's region.

CONCLUSION: A LONG TERM PROJECT: BUILDING THE COLUMBIA RIVER'S PACIFIC NORTHWEST

With the completion of the Columbia Basin Study in late 1935, the Pacific Northwest Regional Planning Commission crystallized a clear definition of the Pacific Northwest as a three-and-a-half-state area, whose defining core was the Columbia River. The history of the PNWRPC's developing notion of region shows that this conception of the Pacific Northwest was not some eternal notion, built of an organic sense of unity and connectedness, unanimously felt as *the* proper notion of region; nor was it all-inclusive and all-encompassing. It was an idea born from a unique historical moment and geographic location, crafted by a distinct set of people and interests who came together for specific purposes, and with particular ideals, goals and assumptions about place, environment and society. Politically and economically, the moment was the New Deal and the Depression, when federal public works money was one of the few sources of investment available. The location was a relatively undeveloped corner of the United

States which happened to have almost half the hydropower potential in the country – as well as a large river that could be harnessed for irrigation and inland navigation. Technologically, the moment was one in which hydropower development and long distance transmission had advanced enough to offer prime economic opportunities. Intellectually, the moment was one in which anxious Americans sought ways to reassure themselves in the face of rising fascism and communism overseas and threatening internal social strife, and many were attracted to the notion of regions as reservoirs of longed-for harmony and livelihood. All of these pieces came together into the definition of the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest.

The result was a conception of the Pacific Northwest region that paired public- and conservation-minded regionalist principles with widely shared self-interested ambitions for Columbia River development. Governance was a pairing of state-based regional participation with federal government guidance and money. The particular geography chosen – roughly based on the Columbia Basin, but with corners truncated and added to conform to state territories and include the dominant commercial area in Puget Sound – meant a focus on the Columbia River as the central resource and development opportunity for the region, an emphasis on economic development for trade between the region's cities and its vast hinterland, and an embracing of the basic political geography of American federalism.

In this regional conception, then, regional leaders' existing desires for Columbia River development were shaped into a regionalist mold. Economic goals were re-packaged as inherent goals of the region, a kind of manifest destiny for the Pacific Northwest. Thus the Columbia River was to be a central resource for the region, enabling the region to build a more well-balanced economy and shared prosperity. While developed, the river would also be conserved. Its water would be judiciously held back or released by dams for the widest and greatest benefit, its scenic areas would be protected, and its fish would be assisted with ladders and hatcheries so they could continue to thrive. The river's benefits would be distributed widely, and poor and remote populations would gain assistance in harnessing the river's benefits to improve conditions and help decentralize the region's population and industry, and even out its prosperity. All this

would enable the Pacific Northwest not only to become more prosperous, but to provide great assets to the nation: jobs and electric power for industry – industry which, of course, would need to relocate to the Pacific Northwest.

Dana, Bessey, McKinley and the others with whom they developed this definition had considerable reason to have confidence in their region's future success. Whereas the PNWRPC had begun with an unmanageable hold-all definition of region, it now had found a focused theme. The regional definition had been adjusted and negotiated to retain the major interests and players with whom the PNWRPC leaders had worked, as well as the connections of water, electric power and trade that those participants most valued. These men were themselves motivated by a genuine sense of public purpose and their vision was backed by regionalist conceptions and regional geography methods of national planners and an esteemed group of intellectuals whose work both national and regional planners had borrowed. In two regional conferences, hundreds had participated enthusiastically. The PNWRPC had negotiated with its parent agency, the national planners, and proved its organizational capacity, ideas and methods were as sophisticated as any, worthy of respect at the highest level of government. And indeed, at the highest level of government – in the President himself – the leaders of the PNWRPC knew they had support, for it was the President who had commissioned their report.

Presidential support would be critical for the PNWRPC's immediate hopes for its newly conceived region. The Columbia Basin Study had been commissioned, of course, to inform possible legislation. The PNWRPC used its new regional definition also to build recommendations for the President; the next chapter will elaborate on these. Leaders of the PNWRPC likely supposed that there might be a legislative fight, but with the support of the National Resources Committee and the President, their recommendations might have fairly clean sailing.

The next year, however, would prove otherwise. In Washington D.C. politics were convoluted, and it would be nearly six months before they would allow the Columbia Basin Study even to be released to the public. More disconcerting, still, in the face of real legislative proposals in Congress and silence from the PNWRPC or the President or anyone else on the Columbia Basin Study recommendations, the supposedly

homogeneous Pacific Northwest that the PNWRPC had just demarcated virtually exploded into fractious divisions. The problem was not, in 1936, the failure to include fisheries connections or to emphasize the importance of protecting river ecologies. Rather, it was that the places and interests meant to be *included* in the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest region contested specific prescriptions of any applied regional vision. The fundamental problem was that cities, states and substate regions, as well as national-scale federal agencies, and the interests and businesses organized within those geographies and agencies, had considerable reason to resist being incorporated into a new government agency organized at a different spatial scale. Portland feared losing local opportunity to dispersed regional benefit. Idaho and Montana mistrusted a region whose population and economic centers would inevitably be located in cities in Washington and Oregon. The Army Corps of Engineers, the Bureau of Reclamation, and private power companies all feared being erased from an entire corner of the country – with possible implications for the rest of the United States – by an all-encompassing regional agency. The list would go on.

Ultimately, the notion that the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest was a preexisting unified region was and is simply wishful thinking. The project over the next two, ten, even seventy years, would be to try to take the PNWRPC's conception of the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest region and turn it into an *actual* region – to take a three-and-a-half-state area with many connections and also many divides, interest in regional coordination for particular purposes but also considerable reason to prefer more traditional jurisdictions and government agencies for other purposes; to take this area and build within it a sense of collective identity and vision, of shared connections to the Columbia River, that would further wide social benefit and environmental stewardship. In many ways the most surprising thing of all is that this project has had considerable success.

CHAPTER III

POLITICS AND COMPROMISE: LEGISLATING THE COLUMBIA RIVER'S PACIFIC NORTHWEST, 1936-7

INTRODUCTION

In 1937, the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest was partially institutionalized into a new federal agency soon to be called the Bonneville Power Administration. Visionaries of the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest – from the PNWRPC to advocates of valley authorities in Washington D.C. – worked hard to codify their ideas in legislation. But as advocates pushed to turn ideas of regional organization and regionalist principles into a federal agency that would have real authority, the latent political conflicts within the Pacific Northwest and within the Roosevelt administration came out into the open. The idea of the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest had to be narrowed and compromised to survive both regional and national political gauntlets. The legislative result in late 1937 was a one-dam, power-only federal agency with very limited authorities, but with regional and somewhat regionalist potential. The agency was supposed to be only temporary, until a more comprehensive Columbia Valley agency was created. But no such comprehensive agency was created, and the one-dam power sales agency would grow to take on much of the mission of its intended replacement. Thus it was that the Bonneville Project Act, which seemed of far less consequence than the legislation hoped for by supporters of regional and regionalist Columbia River development, would prove to be the fundamental legislation which would structure the future building of the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest.

This chapter marks this dissertation's most detailed foray into the kind of nitty-gritty political battles that have repeatedly encumbered attempts to institutionalize more completely the ideas of a Columbia River's Pacific Northwest. It is built from original archival research, particularly the archives of the PNWRPC, and the Charles McKinley Papers. Professor McKinley went to Washington D.C. after the completion of the Columbia Basin Study to write a commissioned study on planning for the President's Committee on Administrative Management (President's Committee on Administrative Management 1937).¹ While there, he acted also as consultant for the national planning agency, by then called the National Resources Committee (NRC). His meticulous record-keeping of NRC meeting notes through much of 1936, and his own insightful political analyses written for the NRC provided unexpectedly rich material for me to better understand what happened to the PNWRPC's recommendations for a Pacific Northwest agency once they reached Washington D.C. I supplemented these archival sources with existing secondary analyses and newspaper coverage.²

While other writers (especially Ogden 1949; BPA 1980; Dick 1989, 1973) have told important parts of the story of the development of what became the Bonneville Project Act, my research uncovered a broader context of regional and federal political machinations, including considerable hostility and volatility both in Washington D.C. and the Pacific Northwest. The hostility to and volatility around plans for a regional Pacific

1. This was the commission commonly called the Brownlow Commission. McKinley had been appointed to work on the Social Science Research Council's Committee on Public Administration in November 1935, and was in Washington D.C. through most of 1936. McKinley's planning study (McKinley, A report concerning a planning organization, draft, October 26, 1936, McKinley Papers) was not published in the final Brownlow Commission report. One can infer that by the time the final report came out in late 1937, planning had become politically unpopular enough that McKinley's work needed to be excised in order for the broader report to sway legislators. (See Graham 1976 for a sharp analysis of the endemic political problems of national planning in the Roosevelt administration.)

McKinley's influence appears to have been far greater and far more national than I initially inferred from his identity as a Portland-based political science professor at little Reed College, or from his comprehensive but rather dry compilation of federal government activities in the Pacific Northwest in his magnum opus, *Uncle Sam in the Pacific Northwest* (McKinley 1952). As noted in a list of his "experience qualifications" his regional analysis in the Columbia Basin Study formed the core of the first in a series of twelve NRC reports on regional planning (McKinley, Experience qualifications, n.d., McKinley Papers) – which suggests that the approach he developed in the Columbia Basin Study to regionalism and regional planning may have been as directly influential to the New Deal as, say, Howard Odum's, who was a more occasional consultant to the NRC. In 1952, he also participated, along with author Arthur Maas and three others, on a study of the TVA's long-range planning (McKinley Unknown Year).

2. In addition to the richness provided by the McKinley Papers, I benefited from the recent technological advance of internet searching of newspaper archives. I was able to access indexes of archives of both *The Oregonian* and *The New York Times*. Others who have written on the politics of the Bonneville Project Act did not have this luxury.

Northwest agency help explain the deep compromises that were ultimately written into legislation. Several writers who have analyzed the failure to pass Columbia Valley Authority legislation (Ogden 1949; Voeltz 1960; McKinley 1952) or a proposed full set of valley authorities for the whole country (Leuchtenburg 1952) have noted President Roosevelt's ambivalence and delay, the propaganda of the "power trust," and the opposition of the Secretary of War.³ All of these played important roles, as this chapter will show.⁴ But these were only the immediate and surface manifestations of far broader political resistance. Nor was that resistance simply in the nation's capital. Within the Pacific Northwest, the ideal of a unified regional program that could bring wide and inclusive social benefit fractured into contested regional visions and policy prescriptions. It was not only that Portland balked at sharing federal power with the region or that the Army Corps of Engineers wanted to control Bonneville Dam; Idaho and Montana newspapers and governors also broke from the regionalist vision, worrying that regional cheap power was a threat to upriver water use and to subsidies for irrigation. All these conflicts exploded destructively in spring 1936 for both the PNWRPC and the National Resources Committee, the regional and federal bearers, respectively, of the Pacific Northwest regionalist message.

There were four pieces of the PNWRPC's prescriptions for the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest that were particularly contentious. Most visible and ultimately the hardest in that political moment were the provisions to make Columbia River hydroelectric power primarily public power. The federal government would retain control of the distribution and marketing of hydroelectric power, and public and cooperative utilities would have preference in buying that power. Less visible and essentially dead on arrival was the PNWRPC's proposed permanent regional planning agency.⁵ In the middle

3. Analysts of later CVA efforts (McKinley 1952; Voeltz 1960; Lang 2001; Ogden 1949) also note the National Reclamation Association became a chief opponent of a CVA after the war.

4. The "power trust" is not as visible a player in my account as in others,' because of the time frame I examine. In 1936-7 private power companies had to be circumspect in their lobbying, especially in the Pacific Northwest, which had many ardent supporters of public power. Private power companies often worked through other entities – including the Portland Chamber of Commerce and later, the National Reclamation Association (Ogden 1949).

5. In 1936 the NRC advanced a bill to give itself statutory permanence, but the bill faced overwhelming opposition in Congress (Graham 1976; NRC minutes (McKinley papers) also reveal attention to this effort).

were two issues that formed the heart of the political fight in 1936-7: the proposed region-wide approach to Columbia River development and sharing of Columbia River benefits, and the recommendation that a new agency, rather than the Army Corps of Engineers and the Bureau of Reclamation, distribute and market Columbia River power.

This was a moment of “constitutive politics” (Berk 1994) in which the particular political fights and negotiations covered a fairly open-ended terrain of what might be the future of the Columbia River and the Pacific Northwest. In the end, it was in D.C., not in the internally conflicted Pacific Northwest “region” that was the object of regionalist dreams, where policymakers could forge and force political compromise. Facing broad opposition, the major supporters of the PNWRPC’s vision in Washington D.C., the National Resources Committee’s Frederic Delano and President Roosevelt himself, negotiated, narrowed and reframed their proposed legislation. They did so not in simple surrender to economic and political opposition, but rather in a sober appraisal of what seemed to them politically possible. The BPA’s mission was narrowed from the PNWRPC’s vision so as to offend fewer of those with whom it would try to work. The new BPA would inevitably be hampered, though, by its limited authorities and uncertain geography, which ultimately reflected the fact that there was considerable ambivalence within the supposedly homogeneous Columbia River’s Pacific Northwest about any kind of shared regional Columbia River project.

But their compromises – and their persistence – also allowed the survival of a considerable part of the regionalist vision. As a result, the one-dam, power-only agency created by the Bonneville Project Act was given provisions that would enable it to become regional, and several key provisions that allowed it to pursue limited regionalist goals such as spreading economic benefit to rural areas, planning industrial decentralization, and conserving scenic areas. In the absence of the hoped-for Columbia Valley Authority, the new BPA would be able to achieve several of its intended replacement’s aims.

There was one major irony about the surviving regionalism within the Bonneville Project Act, which would not become fully clear for at least another decade. The provision for preference in sales to public and cooperative electric utilities marked the

most complete victory of the regionalists' vision. Yet it would end up institutionalizing a geographical unevenness in the region, as areas with public utilities came to benefit more from "regional" power than did areas with private utilities. This geographical unevenness would become one of the central sources of resistance to the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest (see Chapters 5 and 6, and Brooks 2006).

NARROWING THE VISION: A PACIFIC NORTHWEST POWER AGENCY

In its Columbia Basin Study, the PNWRPC did more than crystallize the conception of the Columbia River-centered Pacific Northwest. The Roosevelt administration's purpose in assigning the Columbia Basin Study had not actually been to provide an opportunity for the PNWRPC to legitimize the Pacific Northwest's claim to Columbia River planning with a regional and regionalist conception of a Columbia River-centered Pacific Northwest. The administration had asked the PNWRPC to make recommendations for the "type of organization which should be set up for the planning, construction and operation of certain public works" in the Columbia Basin area (Ickes to Dana, July 8, 1935, NRPB Records). Most urgent was the question of how to distribute and market the huge volumes of power due to come on line at Bonneville Dam in late 1937. Not far behind in any question about Columbia Basin development was the even larger Grand Coulee Dam, due to come on line in the early 1940s, but already under construction. In short, the PNWRPC's recommendations were to guide the future management of the Columbia River dams and the river's many resources.

A clear part of the question was whether a regional federal agency roughly in the mold of the Tennessee Valley Authority should be created in the Columbia Valley area. The idea of a CVA was present in the minds of many in 1935 because Idaho's Senator Pope and eastern Oregon's Representative Pierce had that year introduced twin CVA bills. The bills would have created a regional Columbia Basin agency⁶ that would have administered both Bonneville and Grand Coulee Dams, and all future Columbia River

6. Sources on the CVA bills do not specify the geographical extent of the proposed CVAs – that is, whether they incorporated the portions of Washington, Oregon and Idaho which lie outside the Columbia Basin, or the portions of Wyoming, Utah and Nevada which lie within. I have not tracked down the original Pope bill to determine this.

and tributary dams. It would have sold its power preferentially to public and cooperative utilities, and would have aimed to bring about maximum use of the river for various purposes, including ‘the economic and social well-being of the people living’ in the basin. In addition to hydropower, it would have responsibility for irrigation, flood control, and navigation. (McKinley 1952, 544).

Following the introduction of this bill, in April 1935, the Idaho State Planning Board surveyed over 1200 “prominent citizens” of the four states of the PNWRPC about their thoughts on a CVA. The responses suggested that many supported a CVA but few had yet to develop a clear opinion (PNWRPC 1935a, Appendix Z-k).

Several months later, in fall 1935, as the PNWRPC was preparing its Columbia Basin Study, it found clearer opinions – and more opposition. In seven hearings throughout the four states,⁷ most commentators now opposed a CVA. They argued instead that existing federal agencies should continue their operations. Many – especially from Idaho and Montana – were worried about a possible loss of state rights and other federal development opportunities to a new regional federal agency (PNWRPC 1935a, Appendices Z-A, Z-b, Z-e). The Portland Chamber of Commerce saw a multipurpose agency like a CVA as an experimental setup which would cause inefficiencies (PNWRPC 1935a, Appendix Z-f). The Seattle and Spokane Chambers were worried about possibly delaying completion of the Grand Coulee Dam and its massive irrigation endeavor (PNWRPC 1935a, Appendices Z-d, Z-h).

Of the written statements collected, only that from the Oregon State Federation of Labor supported a CVA (PNWRPC 1935a, Appendix Z-g). But three particularly well-informed statements from the Washington State Planning Council, the Tacoma Chamber of Commerce, and University of Washington’s Electrical Engineering Professor C. Edward Magnusson supported an interesting alternative: a regional authority which would deal only with electric power (PNWRPC 1935a, Appendices Z-c, Z-j, Z-i).⁸

7. Hearings were held in Helena, Montana; Spokane and Seattle, Washington; Boise and Pocatello, Idaho; and Pendleton⁴ and Portland, Oregon (NRC 1936).

8. The Tacoma Chamber and Professor Magnusson had quite sophisticated descriptions of how transmission and rates should be set up.

Summarizing these hearings, Bessey wrote that “more conservative views” predominated, many of them from various Chambers of Commerce. These tended to view the problem “from comparatively narrow angles.” He chocked this up to the fact that most groups had not had much time for thorough consideration of the issues (PNWRPC 1935a, Appendix Z-1). The PNWRPC would not be so narrow, though; its job was to think broadly and regionally. Presented with wide opposition to a CVA, it backed off from an all-encompassing agency. Instead it followed the three compromise suggestions and recommended a regional “superpower agency” which would be responsible for only electric power, and might not even own or operate any dams. It mapped out a planned power grid for the agency (figure 3.1). Tasks unrelated to power would be left to existing “Nation-wide administrations which are already functioning in this region.” The recommendations included language, too, which assured non-interference with state and federal regulation of power, and made it clear that “release of water from Federal storage reservoirs” was “subject to State rights and irrigation needs” (NRC 1936, 10-11).

Within the constraints of a power-only agency which would defer non-power rights and purposes to states and other federal agencies, though, the PNWRPC drew from the TVA idea. The regional superpower agency should be an independent federal corporation that was regionally based and whose purpose was regionally and publicly defined. The PNWRPC even suggested a three-man board of directors, echoing the TVA’s setup. Bonneville, Grand Coulee, and future projects should be interconnected in a regional high-voltage transmission grid (figure 3.1.) Power should be sold cheaply and widely, and preference in sales contracts should be given to public and cooperative utilities. But private business should benefit too: low rates were meant to attract private industry and enable regional economic diversification (NRC 1936). The PNWRPC listed a long set of powers the agency should have in order to transmit and market power, and to control its power sales contracts (NRC 1936).⁹

9. Some of the powers the PNWRPC recommended for the agency were: the powers to condemn land, build transmission lines, market and sell power, set resell rates for wholesale power sold to utilities, exchange power with other power systems, plan for further extension and development of the power system (NRC 1936).

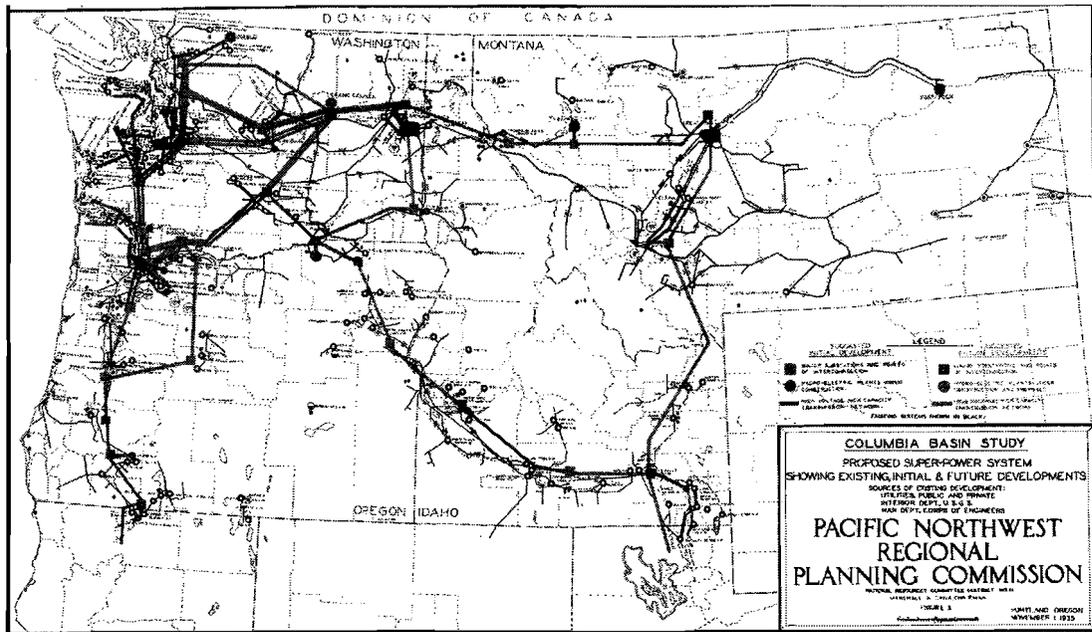


Figure 3.1. Proposed regional grid for a Pacific Northwest regional power agency. The grid plan was prepared by consulting engineer Charles Carey and published as part of the PNWRPC staff report in the Columbia Basin Study. The triangle of the proposed core high-voltage grid shows up in the northwest corner of the map; it connects Puget Sound in its northwest corner, Grand Coulee Dam in its eastern corner, and Bonneville Dam and Portland in its southwest corner. Carey would later become the chief engineer for the BPA, and designed the actual regional grid, that closely followed this plan. *Source:* NRC 1936, 40.

Despite backing off from a CVA, the PNWRPC also remained committed to finding a way for regional governance to implement a wider regionalist vision that would include continued consideration of the many resources the river could provide besides electric power. To address both of these, the planning commission advised that the superpower agency should also continue to work closely with a permanent Pacific Northwest regional planning agency. The chair of the PNWRPC, the commission suggested, might be one of the superpower agency's three directors (NRC 1936).

With this recommendation, the PNWRPC felt quite confident it had put together a plan that reflected a broad and long-term view of regional needs and opportunities that pulled together different people's and places' needs and concerns. The PNWRPC sent its final report to the National Resources Committee on December 28, 1935. It hoped that its recommendations could be used by the 1936 Congress to create a new agency, in time for

that agency to be ready to handle the power due to come on line from Bonneville Dam in late 1937.

FROM A PACIFIC NORTHWEST POWER AGENCY TO A BILL FOR BONNEVILLE DAM (1936)

The National Resources Committee (NRC) received the final draft of the PNWRPC's Columbia Basin Study on January 2, 1936. The federal department heads who made up the NRC's official membership sent it promptly on to the President, without review, recommending immediate release because of the "urgent requests of members of Congress from the Pacific Northwest and the desirability of early public discussion of this whole problem" (Ickes, Dern, Hopkins, Wallace, Roper, Perkins, Delano and Merriam to Dana, January 6, 1936, NRPB Records).¹⁰ However, Roosevelt delayed. It was not for lack of agreement with the PNWRPC's recommendations – indeed, he sent a letter of support to Dana, meant to be read at the third Pacific Northwest Regional Planning Conference, to be held in Spokane on February 13-15. But shortly before the Spokane conference, he had a telegram sent telling Dana to suppress the letter, and he told the NRC to hold off on releasing the report (NRC, Conference with the President, February 11, 1936, McKinley Papers).

The President delayed because he was concerned about how a Columbia Basin development program might fit, legally and politically, with other New Deal river and power initiatives. His immediate concern was a pending Supreme Court decision on a challenge to the constitutionality of the TVA. Roosevelt knew that his policy options in the Columbia Basin would depend on the court's decision, and for this reason he waited on the court (Delano confidential to Dana, March 4, 1936, NRPB Records). The decision came down favorably on February 17, but even then he was still cautious. He allowed the NRC to publish a press release summarizing the Columbia Basin Study's findings and recommendations two days later (NRC, Press Release, February 19, 1936, NRPB Records), but the study itself was still not released to the public. The National Resource

10. This letter included the signature of the Secretary of War who, upon reviewing the report later, declined to endorse it.

Committee's Vice Chairman (and Roosevelt's uncle), Frederic Delano, explained in a confidential letter to Dana that the court's decision was a narrow one, and the President still feared that support for the PNWRPC's recommended regional power agency "might result in some more adverse decisions from the Supreme Court and interfere seriously with his program" (Delano confidential to Dana, March 4, 1936, NRPB Records).¹¹ New Deal historian William Leuchtenburg suggests that quite apart from these court-related concerns, the President was disinclined after a marathon "second hundred days" in 1935 to try to pass revolutionary new policy in 1936 (Leuchtenburg 1963). Caution was all the more advisable because 1936 was a presidential election year.

There are many might-have-beens in the story of how Pacific Northwest regionalist ideas did and did not shape legislation. One of the major ones is that if President Roosevelt had responded to the Columbia Basin Study with quick enthusiasm, and pushed Congress to pass a bill creating a regional power agency along the lines of the PNWRPC's recommendations, it might well have happened. Roosevelt's delay and ambivalence were severe debilities for the PNWRPC's vision – and a key to explaining why the agency that grew out of the PNWRPC's recommendations was focused on a single dam, rather than a fully regional or regionalist agency. But it must be recognized that Roosevelt's hesitance was based on very real legal and political pressures. The Supreme Court threatened to undo the entire New Deal, and the President with good reason reeled from the idea of provoking it further. As would become increasingly apparent, Roosevelt also faced strong opposition from within his own Cabinet to any kind of new regional agency. Finally, there was increasing rancor in the Pacific Northwest itself over the potential spoils and costs of Columbia River development and any proposed regional agency.

Indeed, at least as much blame needs to be laid at the feet of the not-so-homogeneous Pacific Northwest – and the naïve notion that any single organizing conception and structure for a large area deemed a "region" could be accepted and

11. Delano explained that the court's decision was narrow, finding simply that the federal government had the authority to sell power that was incidental to a navigation dam. By implication, this left ample room for subsequent rejections of the TVA on other grounds (Delano confidential to Dana, March 4, 1936, NRPB Records). Indeed, the TVA would face a further constitutional challenge, decided in the federal government's favor again, in 1938 (McCraw 1971; Callahan 1980).

codified without significant contest. As the PNWRPC's September 1935 hearings had begun to suggest, for all the commission's conceptual and organizing work, there remained significant differences of opinion about the relationship between the Columbia River and the various parts of the newly conceived region. In the face of a possible new over-arching policy for administering Columbia River power, these intra-regional differences of opinion erupted into vicious name-calling and heated political battles. These divergent forces would have to be grappled with one way or another, and indeed would ultimately shape the long-term history of the Columbia River and its relationship to the Pacific Northwest as much as would the ideals of regionalism. All this would be true regardless of the approach Roosevelt took.

As described in the chapter introduction, there were four issues that formed the heart of the disagreements: whether there should be "preference" in power sales for public power utilities; whether there should be a permanent regional planning agency; whether the agency or power sales should be local or regional; and whether a new agency should administer power from the Columbia River federal dams, or whether it should be the Army Corps and the Bureau of Reclamation. Because of an alliance between Portland and the Army Corps office building the Bonneville Dam, the latter two issues were linked. Controversy over these and other issues would have embroiled any proposal for administration of Columbia River federal dams – indeed, it repeatedly embroiled proposals for valley authorities or any kind of federal power policy (Ogden 1949; Voeltz 1960; Funigiello 1973; Lang 2001), as well as the ongoing practice of the one valley authority that had been created, the Tennessee Valley Authority (McCraw 1971; Creese 1990; Hargrove 1994; Colignon 1997).

Still, the specific ways these conflicts would play out were contingent upon the President's delay and concerns at this critical juncture. The President would not support any fully regional Columbia River legislation for the entire 1936 legislative session. For the first months of 1936, he asked the Pacific Northwest delegation to hold off on introducing or advancing any Columbia River or Bonneville Dam legislation at all.

Without leadership from the President or their own Congressional delegations, the cities and states that were part of the supposedly homogeneous Pacific Northwest began

to fight among themselves in newspapers, reports, and in PNWRPC meetings. They fought over the bounty that might come from a new law governing Columbia River development or Bonneville and Grand Coulee Dams' power. They lined themselves up alongside the two bills proposed the year before – one Senator Pope's CVA bill, one a bill introduced by Oregon Senator McNary, for distribution and sale of Bonneville Dam power by the Army Corps of Engineers to the local area around the dam. McNary had reintroduced his bill in autumn 1935 with the other Oregon senator, Steiwer (McKinley 1952), and in early 1936 the McNary-Steiwer bill for Army Corps local distribution of Bonneville Dam's power stood as the one proposal on the table. Some understood the unpublished Columbia Basin Study to throw strong support to a CVA-style bill, even if it advised against a full CVA, and as word got out, it began to provoke corresponding support and antagonism. It was not a good environment to build a regional or regionalist agency.

The first shot against the PNWRPC's regional vision was fired by the Oregon State Planning Board, with its publication in late December 1935 – that is, concurrent with the completion of the Columbia Basin Study – of its *Study of the Wholesale Cost of Bonneville Power*. This report assumed only local distribution of Bonneville Dam power to the greater Portland area and the lower Columbia, and recommended rate schedules to favor industrial customers (Oregon State Planning Board Advisory Committee on Power 1935; Ogden 1949). In other words, despite the fact that the Oregon State Planning Board was a part of the PNWRPC, and its representative to the regional commission had joined the unanimous action of the PNWRPC supporting the commission's conclusions in the Columbia Basin Study (NRC 1936, 8), the state board as a whole chose to follow its senators' 1935 bill, not the recommendations of the Columbia Basin Study. Charles Carey, the engineer who had laid out the plan for the PNWRPC's proposed regional grid (figure 3.1) wrote Bessey in early February, pointing out the Oregon report's faulty technical and economic assumptions. But more fundamentally, he questioned the motives of the Oregon Planning Board's staff and members. Given their "knowledge of the special report to the President on the Columbia River Valley," he asked, why should this report "be submitted unless it was for the express purpose of laying a foundation for

defeating the fundamental principles which were set forth in the Columbia Basin report” (Carey to Bessey, February 11, 1936, NRPB Records)?

Oregon’s motives were clear enough. Business and civic leaders in the Portland area – led once again by the zealous Portland Chamber of Commerce – argued that Bonneville Dam, like the river on which it was located, was the city’s natural advantage (e.g. Portland Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors, Statement on proposal for a Pacific Northwest Power Agency , February 21, 1936, NRPB Records). If Bonneville power were restricted to the Portland area, Portland would have several years to enjoy power rates unequalled anywhere else in the country, until Grand Coulee came on line. Portland would get a jump start in its effort to regain regional prominence. It seemed that the Oregon State Planning Council aimed to support Portland’s hope for a local monopoly on cheap Bonneville Dam power, against the PNWRPC’s recommendation of region-wide distribution and wide “similar” low rates for Columbia River power.

While Portland and Oregon fought for advantage against their Puget Sound rivals, those in the upriver states became increasingly concerned that the coastal metropolises collectively aimed to engineer the river system to obtain all the river’s benefits for themselves. At the PNWRPC’s third regional planning conference in Spokane, February 13-15, Dana’s and Bessey’s lead speeches emphasized the importance of bringing everyone’s views and needs into a region-wide program. The Idaho State Planning Board’s Will Simons questioned their very intentions, accusing the commission:

While you are planning two of the greatest projects in the world, a major source of the Columbia’s energy rushes in from Idaho. We feel... that our projects have been lost sight of. We feel that the Boise and Snake River Valleys should get their share of assistance in the form of additional storage facilities.... We want a survey of our northern and eastern counties with reference to flood control and constructional protection for them... If your development goes on as it is, and Idaho must be content with practically nothing,... energy and water for your projects cannot be assured (Simons 1936).

While the general promise of federal largesse had helped bring the region together, now the fight about how that largesse would be administered was threatening to tear it apart. The way forward would require a political solution.

The day after the NRC press release about the Columbia Basin Study, Dana wrote a letter to the President. There's lots of conjecture, he wrote, about whether you will support a regional agency, or "swing your support to the McNary-Steiwer bill, leaving Bonneville to the Army Engineers, and Grand Coulee to the future." He gently suggested what should be the President's course of action: Congress should be encouraged to "follow the path of research and analysis we undertook in reaching the recommendations we did" (Dana to President Roosevelt, March 6, 1936, NRPB Records).

There can be no doubt that Roosevelt was sympathetic with the idea of a regional agency for the Columbia Basin. On the very same day that Dana wrote to Roosevelt, February 20, 1936, Roosevelt told the NRC Advisory Committee that he hoped not only for a Columbia Basin agency, but perhaps eight regional authorities covering the whole country (NRC, Conference with the President, February 20, 1936, McKinley Papers). Still, when Roosevelt wrote back to Dana several weeks later, he made it clear he intended to delay consideration of the Columbia Basin Study's proposal still further. He hoped, he said, that federal power policy in the Columbia might be integrated into "a uniform [national] program for the construction, management, and control of Federal projects involving the generation and sale of electric energy." "To this end," he wrote Dana in early March, he still had to "give further consideration to these problems" (Roosevelt to Dana, March 6, 1936, NRPB Records).

In the meantime, the PNWRPC was shocked by the responses to the NRC's February 19 press release about the Columbia Basin Study and its recommendations for a regional power agency. The Portland *Oregonian* reported that the proposal was given a "cold reception" (1936). The *Montana Standard* editorialized that the Columbia River plan was a menace to Montana (Dana to Editor of Montana Standard, March 4, 1936, NRPB Records). Newspapers and state politicians from both upriver states argued increasingly vehemently that their needs were not being considered (Bessey to Dana, February 28, 1936, NRPB Records).

To make matters worse, it was during this period, on February 24, that the Washington senators, Bone and Schwollenbach, and eastern Oregon's Representative Pierce introduced another bill to have the Army Corps of Engineers administer

Bonneville Dam's power (1936). Bessey and Dana had to learn through press reports that President Roosevelt had been conferring with the Pacific Northwest senators about Columbia River legislation (Delano confidential to Dana, March 4, 1936, NRPB Records). The chief differences between the new Washington senators' bill and the existing Oregon senators' bill were that the Washingtonians' bill gave rate-setting and a long list of other regulatory powers to the Federal Power Commission, and it gave public and cooperative utilities preference in power sales (McKinley memorandum to Eliot re. Senate Bill 4178 and House Bill 11658, March 31, 1936, McKinley Papers; Bessey, Memorandum re. Bonneville Bills - particularly Bone Bill, March 12, 1936, NRPB Records; BPA 1980).¹²

The Washington senators' alternative reflected the fact that popular sentiment was far more focused on the issue of public versus private power than on the question of regional versus local administration of a river and its dams. Public power and regionalism were closely allied in their proponents' minds, but in the practice of political contest and compromise, the insistence on the former seemed to come at the cost of compromise on the latter.

Discouraged by both the tensions at the regional planning conference in Spokane and legislative developments in Washington D.C., Bessey and Dana tried to bring back a spirit of collaboration and constructive dialogue – a spirit, that is, of a unified, inclusive region. Preserving the regional planning commission was, wrote Bessey on March 2, “decidedly the most important thing we have to do.” He urged individual meetings with each of the state representatives before the next PNWRPC meeting, to be held in mid-March in Missoula. He feared, though, that no matter their efforts, political leaders from the Pacific Northwest states would “discredit their able representatives” to the regional commission (Bessey to Dana, February 28, 1936, NRPB Records).

At the commission meeting on March 14 in Missoula, the PNWRPC heard a resolution from Montana that proposed four fundamental principles for any regional

12. McKinley commented in a memorandum to the NRC's Charles Eliot, “[N]early every significant act concerning the sale of surplus energy from Bonneville is to be approved by the Federal Power Commission... To be blunt, if there is such fear of the Army operation of Bonn as to justify all these restrictions, then the Army should not be permitted to operate the enterprise” (McKinley memorandum to Eliot re. Senate Bill 4178 and House Bill 11658, March 31, 1936, McKinley Papers).

drainage basin agencies “located wholly or partly within semi-arid” areas. Montana’s principles protected and prioritized irrigation and state water rights. The PNWRPC appointed a committee to consider adopting these principles (C. Ben Ross to J. P. Pope, May 21, 1936, NRPB Records).¹³

Faced with two Bonneville Dam bills, still without any leadership from the President, and with the Columbia Basin Study still being held from publication months after its completion, Bessey and Dana tried to find a way to engage constructively with Congress. In a speech on March 9 in Vancouver, Washington, Dana said he supported a Bonneville-only bill, provided it was understood as a temporary measure to be integrated later in a regional program (Dana, Speech, Vancouver, WA, March 9, 1936, NRPB Records). Bessey then published two memos on March 12 and 14 pointing out problems with the two standing bills. He did not challenge their focus on Bonneville Dam, but instead criticized their economics. Neither bill, noted Bessey, would increase production and sales quickly enough. Only high-volume sales very early on could allow low rates to cover the dam’s costs. Although Bessey sympathized with the intentions of the Bone bill’s public preference clause, he noted – quite accurately, as it would turn out – that rapid growth in power sales would require large volume sales to existing, often private, utilities and large industry (Bessey, Memorandum re. Bonneville Bills - particularly Bone Bill, March 12, 1936, NRPB Records, 1936b).

Back in Washington D.C., the NRC tried to support the PNWRPC, the Columbia Basin Study, and a regional Columbia Basin program, but faced its own set of political difficulties. Its problems were resistance from the powerful: the President, its own committee membership, and Congress. The Advisory Committee and the staff of the NRC were strongly supportive of the PNWRPC’s Columbia Basin Study. They had reviewed its several drafts in the fall, well before they had had the committee forward the

13. It adopted Montana’s principles later that year. The four principles were:

The use of water for domestic and irrigation purposes is superior to all other uses

The prior right to the beneficial use of water as near the source as is practically and economically feasible is a necessary protection to the semi-arid headwater regions, and is of the most benefit for the entire region, because it makes possible the repeated use of water for multiple purposes.

Control measures upstream should be given prior consideration as to time of construction.

A majority of membership of the controlling board, or boards, should be made up of qualified citizens of the region who have an intimate knowledge of the problems involved.

final draft to the President in January (Eliot to Dana, December 16, 1933, McKinley Papers). By mid-March the staff had the Columbia Basin Study in page proof waiting for a letter of transmittal to the President. They had been impressed enough with the report to ask Charles McKinley to help draft this letter (NRC, Minutes, Advisory Committee, March 14-16, 1936, McKinley Papers).¹⁴ But the NRC's staff and advisory leaders were not sure of the President's support. They thought he agreed with the Columbia Basin Study's recommendation for regional program, but, on the other hand, "it had been represented that the McNary bill ha[d] the support of the White House" (NRC, Minutes, Advisory Committee, March 14-16, 1936, McKinley Papers). Further, while the NRC's staff and Advisory Committee were fully supportive of the PNWRPC's recommendations, the actual committee itself was made up of the President's Cabinet, that is, the heads of the federal departments. These heads of departments were, as Otis Graham explains in his incisive book on national planning (Graham 1976), the enemy: the leaders and protectors of existing governmental programs and their interest group constituencies that had most to lose from planners' attempts to reorganize or reinvent governmental responsibilities. Finally there was Congress. The NRC leaders desperately wanted some stability in authority and funding so sought legislation that would give the NRC permanent statutory standing (NRC, Meeting Minutes, February 21, 1936, McKinley Papers). This meant that in the fight over Columbia River legislation, the NRC needed somehow to offend neither conservatives nor the Congressional allies of traditional governmental organization.

To move along both the Columbia Basin Study and legislation along the lines of the study's recommendation, the most immediate need was assuring the President's support. The NRC's Delano wrote a confidential memorandum to his nephew the President on March 16, strongly suggesting he endorse the Columbia Basin Study against the McNary bill, and support a regional Columbia River power program rather than hand over control of Bonneville Dam to the Army Corps of Engineers and Portland (Delano confidential memorandum to the President re. Bonneville power, March 16, 1936, McKinley Papers). Later that day, in a meeting with Delano and others of the NRC

14. See footnote 1.

Advisory Committee, Roosevelt was sympathetic but seemed unwilling simply to tell Senator McNary to pull his bill. He said it was too early to make recommendations for a permanent regional authority, but had been thinking about a bill that would allow him to appoint three commissioners to administer Bonneville Dam's power. This would in effect create a new agency more answerable to the President than was the Army Corps of Engineers – and perhaps even allow enough leeway for a regional agency. He encouraged the NRC to go ahead and finish their statement for the Columbia Basin Study, to put together recommendations on how to proceed, and to draft a letter for him to give the Pacific Northwest Congressional delegation (NRC, Conference with the President, March 16, 1936, McKinley Papers). This was, in other words, an attempt to find a tactful way forward that might lead gradually toward a future Columbia River agency in the mold of the PNWRPC's recommendations.

Next was finessing the support, or at least the acquiescence, of the full NRC committee, the President's Cabinet. Particularly problematic was the Secretary of War, George Dern, who would almost certainly disapprove of the PNWRPC's report, given its recommendations that a new agency take control of Bonneville Dam power rather than the Army Corps of Engineers.¹⁵ After the NRC Advisory Committee conferred with the President, Delano wrote a confidential letter to Dana explaining that the delay was caused by uncertainty about how to proceed with the national planners' introduction to the regional study. If they wrote a forward with a full endorsement, the Secretary of War would likely withhold approval. A disagreeable alternative would be to write only a general endorsement, suggesting that any policy decision would be up to Congress and the President. Instead, the President would probably call for a temporary commission pending more elaborate legislation another year. If this were done before the report with the NRC staff's endorsement was presented to the full committee, the War Secretary

15. This kind of opposition was not unique to the War Secretary – but the narrowing of the vision to a regional power agency had forestalled wider opposition from the Cabinet. In the 1937 effort to create a series of valley authorities the opposition of the Secretary of Agriculture was just as important (Leuchtenburg 1952). The Bureau of Reclamation was the other agency besides the Army Corps with reason to oppose a regional power agency on the Columbia River. It was silenced at top levels, though, because it was housed within the Interior Department, whose Secretary was a chief supporter of the proposal for a Columbia River agency as well as other valley authorities. The Bureau offered significant resistance within the Pacific Northwest later, however (Brooks 2006; Ogden 1949; McKinley 1952).

might not oppose the report or the bill (Delano confidential to Dana, March 18, 1936, McKinley Papers).¹⁶

The NRC and the President proceeded quickly with their plan. On March 18 the President signed the NRC-drafted letter to the Pacific Northwest delegation. The letter suggested:

In considering the situation concerning the distribution and marketing of power from the Bonneville Dam... the need is apparent for some legislation at this session of Congress. While it is probably too early to make final recommendations concerning any general arrangements for the marketing of Bonneville power in relation to other major projects in the Pacific Northwest, we can establish an agency to deal temporarily with the Bonneville situation.

It is my opinion that a new agency for this purpose would be desirable, involving the appointment by the President of three individuals to serve as a Northwest power agency. Such an organization should have authority to enter into necessary arrangements for the distribution and marketing of the power (Roosevelt, March 18, 1936, quoted in Columbia River (Bonneville Dam), Oreg. and Wash. 1936).

The outcry to this compromise proposal suggests the challenges that would be faced by any proposal for an independent regional power agency. The press and Northwest political leaders and interest groups attacked, targeting the President, Delano, the NRC, the PNWRPC and the Columbia Basin Study. Dana's own *Oregon Journal* criticized Delano, while Senator McNary asserted that creating a new power agency or interconnecting Bonneville Dam with Grand Coulee would sharply increase rates for the lower Columbia River area and rob it of the benefits of proximity to Bonneville Dam (Bessey, memorandum to Dana, March 23, 1936, NRPB Records). The outcry was brought home to the NRC when the Secretary of War, George Dern, learned from Pacific Northwest senators about the letter. Secretary Dern was furious that the President's proposal had been worked out behind his back – he recognized the President's letter to the Pacific Northwest delegation had been penned by the NRC's Advisory Committee – and that it left out the Army Corps of Engineers. He attacked the Columbia Basin Study

16. At the same time the NRC pushed a bill to provide for a permanent national planning agency (McKinley 1936a). The NRC likely sought to protect the President and mollify the Secretary of War in part to preserve and protect its own reputation and political support. See also Graham 1976.

recommendations as unconstitutional, the PNWRPC as a “semi-official organization,” and national planning as a wasteful duplication of existing agencies’ activities (Dern to Ickes, April 11, 1936, McKinley Papers).

The PNWRPC sought to smooth out tempers and win back support for both regional and national planners. On March 25 it distributed a long memorandum explaining its recommendations. While the regional commission favored a regional grid and regional power agency, it noted, the point was to provide cheap power for the whole region – not to deny river benefits to any particular city or other part of the region. Further, the regional planning commission had not taken a stand on rate structures; this was for the agency given responsibility for power marketing to decide.¹⁷ Rate structures were a key part of the argument over a regional versus local agency; rates graded by distance from Bonneville Dam would confer the major economic advantages upon Portland against its more distant rivals. Nor was the PNWRPC against providing power for industry (PNWRPC 1936; Dana to Ed W. Miller, March 31, 1936, NRPB Records). Dana also wrote to NRC head Harold Ickes, expressing deep regret for the unjust press accusations against Delano (Dana to Ickes, March 23, 1936, NRPB Records).¹⁸

Alas, the PNWRPC’s clarifying memorandum still suggested far too much regional sharing for Portland interests. The paper from Portland’s twin city, the Vancouver, Washington *Columbian*, published an editorial on April 2 entitled “Sold down the river.” It framed the proposal for a regional grid as a Puget Sound plot, and the President’s idea of a commission as a betrayal. It attacked the PNWRPC at its most vulnerable point – Marshall Dana’s role as editor of the Portland-based *Oregon Journal*:

What has happened to induce Marshall Dana to espouse the cause of Puget Sound and betray the interests of southwest Washington and his own state of Oregon?

We have known... that all the influence of Seattle and Tacoma would be exerted to tie Bonneville dam to Grand Coulee and thereby

17. The language in the Columbia Basin Study had in fact been ambiguous, recommending rates similar over broad areas (NRC 1936). Exactly how big and what this would mean, the PNWRPC now insisted, was up to the new agency to decide.

18. Delano wrote back to Dana, reassuring him by making light of the problem. “I gather I was criticized in press,” he wrote. “I’m not worried – I’m not running for office.” Senator McNary, he continued, was just blowing off steam. Still, he asked Dana to keep him informed about press reports (Delano to Dana, April 3, 1936, NRPB Records).

increase the cost of power on the lower Columbia....It is only another manifestation of the narrow and selfish view heretofore shown by the Puget Sound cities.... While we cannot forget nor condone their antagonism..., we can at least understand it for they fear that cheap power here may bring industrial plans to this section which they might otherwise attract to themselves....

But why Marshall Dana should join forces with them against the lower Columbia river area is not so readily explained. Has there been a sell-out? If so, what was the price?... Senator McNary is making a gallant effort to protect local interests and should have Dana's support....

And where now is the *Oregon Journal*? Will it keep silent, or will it voice the resentment of its constituency against the outrageous betrayal of the lower Columbia country? (1936)

For now, the Portland-area press, Oregon Senator McNary, the Army Corps of Engineers and the War Department were acting almost as one voice. Portland business interests and the Corps had formed an alliance to support Corps-controlled local-area power distribution that would provide cheap power for industrial development in the greater Portland area. Senator McNary and the War Department backed up the interests they represented (Ogden 1949; see also John Lewis's comments, submitted by J.D. Ross, in *Navigation and flood control on the Columbia River and its tributaries* 1936). Successful legislation would require support from Senator McNary, and at least tolerance from the War Department.

What was interesting was that Idaho and Montana joined the chorus against a regional agency – though they proved to be willing to tolerate a new agency if it would deal only with Bonneville Dam. The Idaho State Planning Board wrote Dana saying it was apprehensive about the PNWRPC's memorandum as it seemed to stress the need for a permanent regional power agency and the Idaho board had “taken a definite stand against legislation for a permanent organization at this time” (J. D. Wood to Dana, April 6, 1936, NRPB Records 1934). When pressed, the board expressed support for a “comprehensive power agency specifically for Bonneville” but not for Grand Coulee or a regional program (H. P. Taylor to Dana, April 6, 1936, NRPB Records, emphasis in original). Montana's Governor Holt wrote to Dana saying Montana was opposed to any permanent agency. The Montana governor argued that the PNWRPC should not be

pushing legislation until it had decided on Montana's proposed fundamental principles for regional agencies that lay "wholly or partly within semi-arid areas" (Holt letter attached in Ross to J. P. Pope, May 21, 1936, NRPB Records).

Idaho's and Montana's positions were gradually becoming clear. The concerns that they had expressed in the PNWRPC's fall 1935 hearings about states' water rights and protection of irrigation were coalescing into solid positions against a regional agency of any kind, even one dealing only with power. There were several fears behind this opposition, some of which were now formulated and others of which had not yet coalesced. Most clear from the beginning was the fear that a regional agency might be able to compel use of the river's water in a way that would preclude development of upstream irrigation. Idaho's economy, politics and culture were dominated by irrigation farming in the Snake River Plain, the dominant physical feature of southern Idaho. Idaho business and political leaders feared that a Columbia River power agency might depend on the water of the Columbia River's greatest tributary, the Snake, and that a federal Columbia River agency would have the authority to prevent future irrigation projects from consuming the Snake River's water if that water were needed for downstream generation. Montanans were less worried about the irrigation in the mountainous Columbia Basin portion of their state than the precedent that might be set for the Missouri Basin, where a valley authority had also been proposed (PNWRPC 1935a Appendix Z-A). The second fear, mainly from Idaho – dominant southern Idaho at least – was that power sold too cheaply would itself preclude irrigation development. Irrigation was a costly business, while agriculture often faced low profit margins. Further irrigation development would depend upon subsidies from power sales. If Grand Coulee or other "regional" Columbia River power were sold too cheaply in Idaho, there would be few power customers left to subsidize irrigation. Idaho power markets should be reserved for Idaho irrigation projects, wrote Idaho's governor (C. Ben Ross to J. P. Pope, May 21, 1936, NRPB Records; McKinley, Interview notes with Callahan: Why Idaho is not regionally minded, July 17, 1939, McKinley Papers).¹⁹ Thirdly, there was the simple fear

19. There is considerable evidence to suggest that behind this protection of Idaho irrigation was also a desire to protect southern Idaho's dominant private utility, Idaho Power. Idaho Power had set up a deal with the Bureau of

that if Bonneville and Grand Coulee Dams were seen as “regional” projects, then Montana and Idaho might not get federal support very soon for the projects they wanted far more: further reclamation and flood control in Idaho, mineral development and forest and soil conservation in Montana (C. Ben Ross to J. P. Pope, May 21, 1936, NRPB Records). They fundamentally contested the benefits that the Bonneville and Grand Coulee projects offered to them – Bonneville was far away, while power from Grand Coulee would be expensive in Montana (PNWRPC 1935a, Appendix Z-A), and its promised irrigation empire in central Washington threatened competition for Idaho farms (McKinley, Interview notes with J. D. Wood: Idaho’s interest, July 18, 1939, McKinley Papers). Finally there appeared to be an unspoken antipathy to industrial development in Idaho. Idaho agriculture and mines would benefit from industrial development and population growth in port cities that might buy their products, but southern Idaho leaders had little interest in manufacturing industries developing within the borders of the state (Stacy 1991).²⁰

Only Washington remained consistently supportive of Columbia Basin Study’s proposed regional power agency. But its motives were suspect. Seattle and Tacoma had public municipal power systems, and several Public Utility Districts had recently been created in other parts of the state. A powerful alliance of large and small public utilities and their many customers welcomed the idea that large volumes of cheap federal power might be sold preferentially to public utility systems. Further, Washingtonians were not unaware of Portland’s ambitions – and some, at least, saw the PNWRPC’s regional approach as supporting their interests instead. A member of the Tacoma Chamber of Commerce wrote to Dana, “We consider the method to be used in disposing of the surplus power at Bonneville and Coulee if not properly handled will have a detrimental

Reclamation in which it bought power not needed for irrigation from the Bureau’s southern Idaho dams at a very low rate, and then sold it at considerably higher prices (see comments from Compton White, representative from northern Idaho, in *Columbia River (Bonneville Dam), Oreg. and Wash. 1937: 357+*, and Appendix E: 506+). A regional power agency which sold Bonneville or Grand Coulee power very cheaply in southern Idaho could end the market for Idaho Power’s pricey resale power. Worse, it might incorporate the Bureau dams into the regional power system, ending Idaho Power’s own supply (see Stacy 1991 on Idaho Power’s earlier fight to retain the right to sell Bureau power, and its later fight against BPA power lines in Idaho).

20. One gets the sense that Idaho business and political leaders hoped to keep out undesirable working-class labor and non-Anglo immigrants. One gets hints of this even from Idaho Power’s celebratory history of itself (Stacy 1991).

effect on Puget Sound. We also believe the recommendations of your Commission are about as secure and as complete as could be expected for a basis on which to build" (Walsh to Dana, April 14, 1936, NRPB Records 1934). Some Portland area business interests pointed out that Seattle City Light had just brought on line its own large new dam, and argued Seattle's interests were in making sure it did not lose industrial customers to Portland where rates would be cheaper if Bonneville power were sold locally (Neuberger 1937).

As opposition to a regional program grew clearer and stronger within the Pacific Northwest, back in Washington D.C. the NRC's plan was beginning to work. The Columbia Basin Study was finally released for publication. It had won the War Secretary's disdainful tolerance. The President's calculations had been accurate: since War Secretary Dern knew that the active proposal in Congress was for an agency to deal only with Bonneville Dam, he did not fight the Columbia Basin Study's publication. He refused to sign the NRC's letter of endorsement, but also did not make a public fuss. On April 21, the NRC at last forwarded the Columbia Basin Study to the President with a strong endorsement for the PNWRPC's recommendations (McKinley 1952).

But Secretary Dern knew which fight mattered most to the Corps' future at Bonneville Dam. Neither the still-unpublished Columbia Basin Study, nor the President's call for a three-man commission to administer Bonneville's power, managed to compel legislative action. After conferencing with the President and the northwest delegation, Oregon Senators McNary and Steiwer introduced their new 1936 bill on April 29. It said nothing about a regional program or agency, nothing about a three-man commission that might administer the dam's power (S. 4566, 74th Cong., 2nd Session, full text in *Navigation and flood control on the Columbia River and its tributaries 1936*).

Finally, in early May, the PNWRPC was at last given the opportunity to make its case to Congress for a regional and even regionalist power agency. On May 6, the NRC handed advance copies of the Columbia Basin Study to policy-makers and published a press release recommending "immediate creation of a Pacific Northwest power agency." The next day, the Senate began hearings on the Bonneville bills, as well as Senator Pope's 1935 CVA bill. Delano, Dana, and McKinley testified, speaking strongly for a

regional agency, and with great respect for the work of the PNWRPC. Their audience included Senator Norris, the senator who had championed the TVA Act, and Senator Pope, who had introduced the CVA bill. It also included Senators McNary of Oregon and Schwollenbach of Washington. In these hearings, then, the case for a regional Pacific Northwest agency was made by some of those who could best articulate it, and it was presented to federal decision-makers who had the power, and considerable inclination, to create a regional agency (Navigation and flood control on the Columbia River and its tributaries 1936; for others' elaboration on these hearings, see Ogden 1949; BPA 1980).

Also participating in the hearings was J.D. Ross, director of Seattle City Light and member of the Securities and Exchange Commission. After federal legislation was finally passed for Bonneville Dam in August 1937, Ross would become the key carrier of the baton of Pacific Northwest regionalism as the first administrator of Bonneville Dam's power. Thus these hearings reached not only policy-makers of the moment, but a key implementer of policy in the near future.

Dana made the fullest case not only for a regional Pacific Northwest agency but a regionalist one. He went into great detail about the regionalism study behind the PNWRPC recommendations. The Pacific Northwest had been found to be a unified homogeneous region, and in almost all its development potential the Columbia River was "a vital and great factor" (p. 71). Up until now, the Pacific Northwest had been mainly a producer of primary commodities and purchaser of manufactured goods. Now, Columbia River development and concomitant industrial and agricultural development could allow the Pacific Northwest greater self-sufficiency, and with it, considerable social, political, and economic advancement. Dana emphasized especially three needs that might be considered regionalist: the need for increased but decentralized industry; the importance of representation for the regional hinterland; and the protection of the scenic Columbia River Gorge (Dana, Navigation and flood control on the Columbia River and its tributaries 1936, 28-36, 49-97).²¹

21. He argued, for example, that Bonneville power would need to be marketed aggressively to reach economies of scale that might make electricity available to all; this would require a wide regional industrial survey to determine diverse and distributed possible industrial locations. Irrigation and upstream water use should be prioritized, and there needed to be "adequate representation of all sections" (p. 71) in negotiating and administering water use

Several participants in the hearings emphasized the importance of decentralizing industry. Dana urged a region-wide survey of potential industrial locations in order to help find and build dispersed industrial locations. Delano, Senator Norris, and J.D. Ross all emphasized the benefits of uniform “postage stamp” rates as a means to distribute industry. “I think most people,” said Ross, almost as if it were unnecessary to state such an obvious point, “realize that overcentralization of population in small localities has a very evil social effect” (p. 131). Ross also supported the argument for a regional agency and uniform rates based on electrical technology and economics. Based on his experience at Seattle City Light, Ross argued that the economics of electricity demanded high-volume sales, which would mean rapid expansion throughout the region to reach as many customers as possible. Expansion throughout the region would be possible and desirable with the long-distance reach and relative affordability of transmission trunk lines (J. D. Ross, *Navigation and flood control on the Columbia River and its tributaries* 1936).

Protection of the scenic Columbia River Gorge also drew comments and support from many; even the Army Corps’ Colonel Robins thought that the Columbia River Gorge was worthy of protection for the benefit of tourists and the economic potential they bring, and for its scenic beauty (Robins, *Navigation and flood control on the Columbia River and its tributaries* 1936, 237).²²

But there were also contradictions among the supporters of a regional program, while others voiced concerns and some, outright opposition. Delano suggested that a Bonneville-only bill could be passed this year as long as it was recognized as temporary (*Navigation and flood control on the Columbia River and its tributaries* 1936); Dana (pp. 84-88, 109-110) supported this idea with reassurances to the senate committee that all

agreements. The desire of some to offer switchboard rates to industry at Bonneville Dam should not be allowed to result in such industrial concentration that it would mar the scenic and recreational values of the Columbia Gorge.

Given his audience, Dana also argued that all this would be good for the nation as well. If the Pacific Northwest, along with other American regions, can “approach the highest degree of self-sufficiency consistent with resources, markets, and general national efficiency”(p. 69) there would be less national waste, and improved national security in case of an international war. Its industrial and agricultural development would provide for people and industry displaced from the crowded East and from retired marginal lands (Dana, *Navigation and flood control on the Columbia River and its tributaries* 1936, pp. 69-71).

22. Robins suggested that to provide for both protection of the scenic values of the Columbia River Gorge and for switchboard rates for industry, a transmission line to just outside the Gorge (Washougal, Washington or Troutdale, Oregon) might be subsidized, so industry could get switchboard rates outside the scenic area.

they needed to add to the current legislation was a statement about its temporary nature, and the intention that it would fit into a regional program. But McKinley (p. 97) argued that “the Bonneville development, if undertaken without a complete envisaging of the program presented by the Regional Planning Commission’s report, is likely to work against the ultimate development of that program.” Senators Schwellenbach and Pope echoed McKinley’s caution, worrying that any contracts made under a temporary measure could undermine the feasibility of a more permanent program later on.

Then, others began to reveal still deeper fractures within the PNWRPC. L.A. Campbell, NRC consultant to the Montana Water Conservation and Planning Board, speaking at the request of Montana’s governor, said that Montana was opposed to the creation of a regional agency at this time, and advocated an interstate water allocation compact first. At the very least, Congress should also adopt the four principles the Montana planning board had adopted and presented to the PNWRPC in March, before passing any regional legislation (p. 37). A member of the Oregon state planning board said as far as he knew the Oregon board had not yet even seen the Columbia Basin Study. Sounding the alarm from Portland, he suggested that any kind of regional equalization of rates might make Bonneville power too expensive for industry (Boyington, Navigation and flood control on the Columbia River and its tributaries 1936, 39).

Senator McNary, the primary sponsor of Bonneville legislation and the minority leader of the senate, who happened to be up for reelection in the fall, listened carefully. He quizzed Delano, Dana, McKinley and Ross all very closely about their recommendations about industrial decentralization and protection of the Columbia River Gorge. One can sense in his questions a desire to understand clearly their arguments for the benefits of a shared regional program – which, after all, would benefit many of his potential rural Oregon voters – while also being concerned to protect Portland’s local interests in its claim to special access to cheap Bonneville power (Navigation and flood control on the Columbia River and its tributaries 1936).

The strongest opposition in the hearings came at the end, from W.B.D. Dodson of the Portland Chamber of Commerce, and Colonel Robins, the Army Corps of Engineers’ lead man on Bonneville Dam construction and planning. Both argued strongly that

uniform rates would raise the price of power so much that it would become uneconomical for industry (Navigation and flood control on the Columbia River and its tributaries 1936).

While these May 1936 senate hearings were influential in making the case to key decision-makers for a Pacific Northwest regional agency and for certain aspects of Pacific Northwest regionalism – even as they also began to reveal significant intra-regional fractures – they did not result in a successful bill. Instead, before the hearings were even over, the Bonneville bills being discussed were effectively discarded and reformulated in back-room negotiations.²³ On May 11, with the committee hearings halted for two days until the Army Corps' Colonel Robins could testify, President Roosevelt met with Senators McNary, Bone and Schwollenbach, as well as Delano and the heads of the Federal Power Commission, the Army Corps of Engineers, the Rural Electrification Administration and the TVA, to try to hammer out a bill all could agree on. The group outlined a composite bill that would be explicitly temporary as a plan for Bonneville Dam power, until more comprehensive Columbia River legislation was passed. The bill would not establish a new agency or uniform rates, but it might make room for a commission appointed by the President. While temporary in its Bonneville policies, it would set up a national system for setting similar rates among all federal projects. This latter directive grew out of concerns that Boulder (now Hoover) Dam's power rates would be higher than those at Bonneville, and present unfair disadvantage; and from a letter from the Federal Power Commission's Basil Manly urging a policy for federal power. Manly argued that rates among federal projects should not diverge too much and thus create competition between agencies or regions.²⁴ The group agreed to a reformulated Bonneville bill that would "be flexible enough to adopt as the basis for a national power policy for federal dams constructed in the future" (Bonneville agreement is reached 1936; Senators preparing new dam bill 1936).

23. The agreement to have such a meeting had actually been made even before the hearings began.

24. Manly predicted that differential rates would create inter-regional competition, in which regions might try to lure industries away from other regions where they were well established (Senators preparing new dam bill 1936). Subsequent history in the Pacific Northwest proves him prescient .

With both senate hearings and back-room meetings completed, the Oregon and Washington senators took on the task of hammering out specific provisions and language for the new composite bill. It was now mid-May in an election year, and any bill would need to be written and passed rapidly. Once again, in the face of indecision in Washington, strife erupted back in the Pacific Northwest, the region so recently represented in the senate hearings in the nation's capital as unified and in need of a regional and regionalist power program. On May 15, in a meeting of some 200 community representatives from the Columbia River Gorge, Oregon Governor Martin held up the Columbia Basin Study and yelled, 'To hell with their report!' and hurled "to the floor the bulky report and recommendations of the northwest regional planning commission, all of whose recommendations the meeting opposed" (Oregon's governor urges stiff fight for Bonneville; Resources Board report attacked 1936).²⁵ Two weeks later this same Oregon governor was happily surprised to get letters from both Idaho and Montana governors in support of his call for local distribution of Bonneville power. They wrote that Idaho and Montana farmers would benefit most from the use of Bonneville power to support industrial development and urban growth; local development around the dam would help create a home market for their farms (Two governors support Martin in criticism of planning board 1936). Dana received similar correspondence from the both the Idaho and Oregon governors (C. Ben Ross to J. P. Pope, May 21, 1936, NRPB Records; Martin to Dana, June 8, 1936, NRPB Records).

On May 23, a beleaguered and disillusioned NRC Advisory Committee wondered about the future of the composite Columbia Basin bill, and also what should be done about the "future of PNWRPC staff." In sharp contrast with the supportive, even laudatory, words Delano had expressed at the beginning of the senate hearings, the meeting minutes noted the "apparent failure of the Northwest group to accurately reflect public opinion in that area" (NRC, Minutes, Advisory Committee, May 23, 1936, McKinley Papers). The NRC was not just disillusioned with the PNWRPC; the PNWRPC had been the leading regional planning group under the NRC's broad

25. The Oregonian's article suggests that they were particularly incensed by the notion that industry would be kept out of the Columbia River Gorge.

umbrella. From now on, the Advisory Committee would be far less inclined to have regional planning groups lead grass-roots experiments in developing regional conceptions and regionalist programs. Instead, they would be assigned specific tasks and directed research programs (Dana to Eliot, March June 18, 1936, NRPB Records).

On May 26, the four senators from Oregon and Washington introduced their composite bill. It said nothing about the temporary nature of the Bonneville bill, nor did it allow the President to appoint a Bonneville commission. Only for future projects, and only in the *absence* of a statute, the President might appoint an agency to administer a dam's power. Of the provisions agreed upon in the back-door meetings from earlier in the month, the bill included only the provision for the Federal Power Commission to set rates for all federal projects. It seemed that the President had decided that authority for a uniform federal power policy was more essential than a regional program in the Pacific Northwest, and that the Pacific Northwest senators, in the face of disturbing press reports back home, had reverted to their Bonneville Dam focus (Bonneville bill dead until 1937 1936; McNary 1936).

The same bill was introduced to the House later that week (Columbia River (Bonneville Dam), Oreg. and Wash. 1936). In both Chambers the bills were referred out of committee (McNary 1936; Mansfield 1936), but they became tied up by controversies over the provisions for Boulder dam and for all federal projects, and were caught in the end-of-session logjam as Congress prepared to break early for election campaigning (Bonneville bill dead until 1937 1936; Ogden 1949). The final legislative deliberations would await another year.

While Washington D.C. politicking could await another year, Pacific Northwest regionalism would not survive fully intact. Regionalism's institutional leaders, the NRC and the PNWRPC, retreated from public view. And the most visible individual leader of the effort – the one who had fought so hard for state and local participation in regional planning and decision-making – also bowed out. In early June, Dana was ready to resign. Bessey and the PNWRPC secretary urged him not to go (Bessey and Frances Wolfe memorandum to Dana, June 3, 1936, NRPB Records), but he made it official on June 18. He explained to the staff only, "I am brought to this decision by the necessities of my

work with the *Oregon Journal*” (Dana, Resignation letter to Delano, June 18, 1936, NRPB Records). To the NRC he offered a bit more reflection in the form of advice for how they should pick a successor. Dana suggested that none of the state representatives should be nominated as the new chairman because “[t]he pressures between the states of the Pacific Northwest” were too great. Bessey could be named general manager, but he “should not be placed between the four state millstones” by naming him chairman, either. Yet Dana was not happy with the Advisory Committee’s decision to assign only specific topics for analysis to the PNWRPC, even though he recognized that approach might reduce tensions among the regional commission’s state-based members. He still held “cherished hopes for broad and continuous regional planning and for a regional development supported and carried forward by a cooperative organization of the people of the region... I feel that [this theme] is a subject close to the heart of the democracy” (Dana to Eliot, March June 18, 1936, NRPB Records). What he did not offer was any suggestion of how a successful cooperative, grass-roots regional democracy might be achieved.²⁶ And in truth, after his departure, the effort would be dead, at least in any kind of state-based grass-roots form, for another four and a half decades.

Still, Dana and his fellows had planted strong seeds of regionalism in rich soil; and they would themselves, many of them, continue to promote aspects of Pacific Northwest regionalism in the continuing, if weakened, PNWRPC; and through other institutions. Regionalism would become far more limited, and much narrower, but it would continue. By far the most important promoter of Pacific Northwest regionalism would be the one-dam, one-function agency created to administer Bonneville Dam’s electric power, in legislation finally hammered out by Congress in 1937.

26. Dana’s subsequent political efforts took a markedly different direction from his promotion of regional-scale governance in cooperation with the federal government during his time at the PNWRPC. Later he would return to work with the National Reclamation Association, including in its fight against cheap federal hydropower; and would become an ardent opponent of later CVA bills. His papers at the University of Oregon begin in 1949, when he was actively working to defeat a CVA bill. It is not clear to me how his support for a more regional and federal approach while at the PNWRPC fit with his later opposition. Perhaps he finally concluded, after his bitter experience at the PNWRPC, that regional governance and states’ interests were, in fact, irreconcilable, and he chose, ultimately, to stand with the latter.

A ONE-DAM POWER AGENCY WITH REGIONAL POTENTIAL AND REGIONALIST VISIONS: THE 1937 BONNEVILLE PROJECT ACT

Even as the potential for real grass-roots region-building in the Pacific Northwest had suffered mortal blows in May 1936, the same month had marked the development of what would finally constitute a successful compromise strategy for a somewhat regionalist program for Bonneville Dam's power. The central elements of what would become the lasting compromise had been hammered out in the mid-May, 1936 back-door meetings among the President, the NRC's Delano, the Pacific Northwest senators, and the various heads of dam- and power-related departments; and it followed the outline of the March 1936 NRC-drafted letter from President to the Pacific Northwest delegation. The key elements were to (a) create a temporary agency for the Bonneville dam, (b) give it the potential to expand its geography into a regional power grid and somewhat regionalist program, and (c) add language to the bill stating the understanding that it was a provisional bill, and would be supplanted by a basin-wide authority. In other words, in contrast to the final bills of the legislative session in which the senators had backed away from the creation of a new agency, while the President had suddenly insisted upon inserting a new federal power equalization policy, the version that would pass in 1937 would extract back out the universal federal power provisions and put back in the new agency.

In 1937, the critical negotiations were actually very few. The Oregon and Washington senators began with the insistence that the universal federal power provisions be taken out of any bill. The President delegated leadership to Interior Secretary Harold Ickes, who began with the insistence that the Corps not be given control of Bonneville power. This meant a new agency. Idaho and Montana remained mollified by keeping the bill limited to Bonneville Dam. The NRC and the PNWRPC largely stayed out of the picture, though Ickes began his negotiations with the Columbia Basin Study in hand – and this influence helped shape important language and provisions in the bill. The one major contentious issue in 1937 was whether the Corps would have any role

at all. Ickes argued no, and had the initial proposed bill drafted to hand over Bonneville Dam entirely once it was completed to a new administrator, except perhaps for operation of the navigation locks. The Chief of the Army Engineers, with the acquiescence of the President, fought to retain as much as possible.

Oregon Senator McNary was, as he had been before, the key compromise vote. Not only was he senate minority leader, brought back to the senate for another six years in a successful election, easily surviving the wave of Democrats arriving in D.C., he remained also in the perhaps unenviable position of himself representing major conflicting interests: Portland, with its desires for special access to Bonneville power, and eastern Oregon, with its enthusiasm for uniform rates. But in 1937 he was driven most of all by a bottom-line determination and political need to get a bill of some kind passed, so that the dam's power could be used by *somebody*. If costs could be kept down so rates would be low, and power might be available in some form to Portland and to rural Oregon, to industry and to residents and farms, then McNary would sign on. The specific form was in the end not as important.

The process by which the successful 1937 bill was hammered out rested on the successes of the 1936 election. FDR's mood in early 1937 contrasted markedly with early 1936. He had won the presidential race in a landslide, and Congress returned with an overwhelming Democratic majority. The election successes, combined with new revelations about lobbying abuses from the private utilities, suggested the time was ripe to push for a coordinated national power program (Funigiello 1973); now, it might find success even without tagging it on to the must-pass Bonneville legislation. But national power legislation and Bonneville legislation must clearly be compatible – and perhaps they might be tied, too, with FDR's ambition to reorganize the federal government into a form that could be managed more effectively, perhaps through a series of regional authorities or planning districts.

In early January, the President asked Interior Secretary Harold Ickes to confer with the Federal Power Commission's Basil Manly and Chairman McNinch about how to work out power policy. Ickes came back suggesting a committee consisting of himself, McNinch, the NRC's Delano, and the heads of the Rural Electrification Administration

and the Securities and Exchange Commissions. The War Department and the Army Corps were notably absent from Ickes' list of invitees.²⁷

Roosevelt promptly set up the committee as Ickes recommended, and requested that it draft both a new Bonneville bill and a draft federal power policy (Ickes 1954; Funigiello 1973; Oregonian News Bureau 1937c; President names board to draw up policy on power 1937). He gave the new National Power Policy Committee only two weeks. Given the urgent need to provide some kind of setup for Bonneville Dam's power, due to come on line before the end of the year, the committee focused on the dam.²⁸ The committee began with the 1936 senate bill as a template, but also carefully referenced the recommendations in the Columbia Basin Study (Ogden 1949; BPA 1980; Voeltz 1962). The committee met with senators and representatives from Oregon and Washington, and with Idaho's Senator Pope, to hammer out a bill (Oregonian News Bureau 1937a, 1937b). The central issues of contention were who should be responsible for transmitting and marketing the dam's power, and how the rates should be set. Senator McNary still backed the Corps' control of the dam, but Ickes refused to entrust Bonneville to the Corps. When McNary said he thought a three-person commission would be too expensive, they settled on a single administrator (Ickes 1954; BPA 1980).²⁹ McNary and the other senators also advised against uniform rates, but the Washington representatives argued in favor (Oregonian News Bureau 1937b, 1937a). The result was another compromise, a decision to *allow* the administrator to set uniform rates (Oregonian News Bureau 1937d). There was wide agreement on the public-versus-private-power battle lines: public and cooperative utilities should have preferential access to Bonneville's power, transmission

27. It may be that the War Department was less prepared to fight its exclusion from this committee because its secretary George Dern had died while in office just a few months earlier, in August, and had been replaced by the assistant secretary, Harry Woodring, in September. Woodring may also have been a less contentious sort. In the 1937 congressional hearings the fight for the Corps was led by General Markham, Chief of the Army Engineers, not by the War Secretary.

28. Funigiello, who wrote the classic work on the effort to develop a national power policy, comments that only Morris Cooke of the REA seemed to recognize that they were passing up their opportunity to formulate a general federal power policy (Funigiello 1973).

29. There was at this exact time a major and very public battle going on between two of the three TVA directors over power policy (President names board to draw up policy on power 1937). It may well be that the choice of a single administrator was also meant to forestall this kind of problem.

should be built by the federal government, and there would be no pooling with the private utilities (Oregonian News Bureau 1937a).³⁰

Then, the President gave the power policy committee a third task: to develop a bill for eight regional authorities or districts, to be organized under a new Department of Conservation within the Interior Department. Roosevelt and Ickes had for close to a year been contemplating this idea and recent floods on the Ohio and Missouri Rivers provided an impetus for legislating better coordination of river basin development. The eight regional authorities would be organized largely by river basin, including one for the Columbia Basin or the Pacific Northwest. These “little TVAs” would “do whatever sound conservation policies demanded” (Ickes 1954, 61; Leuchtenburg 1952).

Still under the two-week deadline for the Bonneville bill, the National Power Policy Committee set this task aside for the moment. But the Bonneville bill which emerged a week later was shaped to be compatible with such a program, as well as with a future national power policy, and with the general outlines of the recommendations in the Columbia Basin Study. The result was a bill for a one-dam agency with considerable regional potential and a large measure of regionalist ambition. As Harold Ickes explained in the House hearings that spring:

[T]he [power policy] committee regarded the Bonneville project as one unit of a great development of the Columbia River... and endeavored to suggest a form of administration readily adaptable to the incorporation therein of the Grand Coulee project upon its completion..... Various safeguards were suggested to insure conformity with a national power policy, ... and ... to encourage the widest possible economic use of electric energy so as to distribute wisely and equitably the benefits of an integrated power system (Ickes, Columbia River (Bonneville Dam), Oreg. and Wash. 1937, 141)

Under the bill that emerged from the power committee, a new “Columbia River Administrator” would be responsible for the operation and maintenance of the Bonneville Dam, and for transmitting and marketing its power. The Columbia River Administrator

30. That the committee felt the need to spell out this last point undoubtedly was a product of the TVA controversy, for this was precisely the topic of the nationally contentious TVA battle. Director Arthur Morgan wanted to develop a power pool system with the private utilities, while Director David Lilienthal wanted to have nothing to do with them (President names board to draw up policy on power 1937; McCraw 1971). The National Power Policy Committee came down on Lilienthal’s side in the Bonneville bill.

would be appointed by and responsible to the Interior Secretary – providing an administrative setup that could be absorbed into a future Columbia Valley authority or conservation district within the Department of the Interior. The expectation of a future Columbia River agency was not only implicitly put into the administrator’s title, but also explicitly adopted into the language of the bill, as Dana and Delano had urged the senate to do the year before. The new bill stated, “The form of the administration... is intended to be provisional pending the establishment of a permanent administration for Bonneville and other projects in the Columbia River Basin” (H.R. 4948, Columbia River (Bonneville Dam), Oreg. and Wash. 1937, Sec. 1, bill is pp. 1-4).

While the bill was to provide a temporary setup for one dam, the Columbia River Administrator was given considerable authority to stretch out geographically to fill out the expected regional geography. He (or, much later, she) would have the authority to build transmission lines to existing and potential markets (Sec. 2 (b)), to interconnect the Bonneville project with other federal projects, and to exchange power with other public and private power systems (Sec. 4 (b)). Some indication of the open-ended and expansive expected geography of the program was suggested by a provision to allow time for the creation of public and cooperative utilities by “the people of the States of Washington and Oregon and... the people of other States within transmission distance of Bonneville project” (Sec. 3(c)) (H.R. 4948, Columbia River (Bonneville Dam), Oreg. and Wash. 1937, 1-4; Oregonian News Bureau 1937d).

Putting into effect at least a small piece of the PNWRPC’s emphasis on the importance of regional familiarity and representation within a regional power agency, the administrator’s office would be located “in the vicinity of the Bonneville project” (Sec. 1). The bill aimed for the new administrator’s sales policies to “encourage the widest possible use of available electrical energy” and “to prevent the monopolization thereof of power by limited groups or localities” (Sec. 2 (b)). Preference would be given to public and cooperative utilities so that Bonneville generation facilities would “be operated for the benefit of the general public, and particularly of domestic and rural customers (Sec 3) (H.R. 4948, Columbia River (Bonneville Dam), Oreg. and Wash. 1937, 1-4).

Finally, rates would be set with “a view to encouraging the widest possible use of electric energy” and they might “provide for uniform rates or rates uniform throughout prescribed transmission areas in order to extend the benefits of an integrated transmission system and encourage the equitable distribution of the electric energy developed” (Sec. 5) (H.R. 4948, Columbia River (Bonneville Dam), Oreg. and Wash. 1937, 1-4).

Once this bill was drafted by the National Power Policy Committee, the Bonneville bill was almost complete as it would eventually pass that summer. It still faced considerable battles in Congress (this time, the key hearings were in the House (Columbia River (Bonneville Dam), Oreg. and Wash. 1937, see Ogden 1949 for more on the 1937 behind-the-scenes negotiations)) and in the press back home, but it turned out to be a compromise all could live with. Almost, that is. The one substantive change was to put the Corps back in charge of power generation at Bonneville. The specific compromise was hammered out by Senator Bone and introduced as an amendment by General Markham, Chief of Engineers. The Corps would retain control of the dam’s operation and maintenance. The new administrator would be responsible for only power transmission and marketing, though he could also direct when the Corps should install new generators. This compromise won the essential support of the Corps and the War Department – whose leaders recognized that the President and Ickes were not going to permit them to have control of administering the dam’s power (Ogden 1949, 199-201).

The other major change was simply in title. The name of the administrator was changed in the final bill to “Bonneville Power Administrator” – presumably to separate the bill from the negative associations with a potential valley authority. Less visible, but important to calm Portland’s defenders, the noxious phrase “to prevent the monopolization ... of power by limited groups or localities” was changed to simply say “to prevent the monopolization ... of power by limited groups” (*Bonneville Project Act* 1937, 16 U.S.C. § 832, Sec. 2(b)). The bill finally made it through both chambers, and was signed by the President on August 20, 1937. It was called only, “The Bonneville Project Act.”

DEDICATING THE BONNEVILLE DAM TO ITS PACIFIC NORTHWEST

If people living near the Bonneville Dam had not yet understood clearly that the dam was connected to a shared vision of a Columbia River-centered Pacific Northwest region, in which all would work together to make an interconnected whole that would be far better than any could do alone, a region whose purpose was to elevate the human condition as well as protect and conserve natural resources, and that this was tied to a grand vision of democratic participation and American greatness, then President Roosevelt helped spell it out for them in his dedicatory address at the dam in September. Said the President:

The more we study the water resources of the nation, the more we accept the fact that their use is a matter of national concern, and that ... our plans.... must include great regions as well as narrower localities.

...

[T]he watershed of the Columbia River, which covers the greater part of the states of Oregon, Washington, Idaho and a part of Montana, it is increasingly important that we think of that region as a unit and especially in terms of the whole population of that area as it is today and as we expect it will be 50 and even 1000 yrs from now.

...

That is why in developing electricity from this Bonneville dam, from the Grand Coulee dam and from other dams to be built on the Columbia and its tributaries, the policy of widest use ought to prevail.... we can well visualize a date, not far distant, when every community in this great area will be wholly electrified.

...[A]s time passes we will do everything in our power to encourage the building up of the smaller communities of the United States. Today many people are beginning to realize that there is inherent weakness in cities which become too large and inherent strength in a wider geographic distribution of population.

...

Your situation in the Northwest is in this respect no different from ... in other great regions of the nation. That is why it has been proposed in the congress that regional planning boards be set up for the purpose of coordinating the planning for the future in seven or eight natural geographic regions.

...

[T]he responsibility of the federal government for the welfare of its citizens will not come from the top in the form of unplanned, hit-or-miss appropriations of money, but will progress to the national capital from the ground up--from the communities and counties and states which lie within each of the logical geographical areas.

...

[I]nstead of spending, as some nations do, half their national income in piling up armaments and more armaments for purposes of war, we in America are wiser in using our wealth on projects like this which will give us more wealth, better living and greater happiness for our children (Roosevelt, Dedicatory address, September 28, 1937, McKinley Papers).

CONCLUSION

The legislation that emerged from the PNWRPC's conception of the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest, and from its recommendations for a Pacific Northwest Power Agency, was far less than advocates had hoped for. The inability to pass more clearly regional and regionalist legislation can be laid at the feet of specific obstacles and complications of these years – the Supreme Court's attacks on New Deal programs and especially its critical examination of the constitutionality of the TVA; the President's caution in the face of the Supreme Court's decisions, the exhaustion from the second hundred days, and an election year; and in 1937, the new intransigence of Congress to do the President's bidding, despite his and Democrats' landslide election victories, once Roosevelt began his campaign to pack the Supreme Court. Alternatively, failure can be blamed on the underhanded tactics of specific foes of a regional agency: the Portland Chamber of Commerce, the Secretary of War, the power trust.

Certainly the specific shape of the legislative compromise that came out of the 1936-7 negotiations depended on all these factors. And yet, in 1936 and early 1937, the ideas of regionalism likely had as strong support in Washington D.C. as they have ever had. The President was strongly sympathetic to regionalist ideas – indeed, the ideas of urban-rural balance and conservation were as central to his values as any (Greer 1958; Leuchtenburg 1963; see also Chapter 2), and he was busy hatching a plan to remold the entire country into regional valley authorities or planning districts (NRC, Conference

with the President, February 20, 1936, McKinley Papers; Roosevelt, Dedicatory address, September 28, 1937, McKinley Papers; Leuchtenburg 1952). A national planning agency led by the President's uncle was leading initiatives to nationalize regional planning and codify national planning. Congress had a strong contingent of progressive social and conservation reformers, including leaders like Senators Norris and Pope who had led the charge for a Tennessee Valley Authority and a Columbia Valley Authority. And yet, even at this moment, the full vision of a regional and regionalist agency for the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest had to be starkly narrowed to survive politically.

Simply put, compromise offered the best hope for the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest no matter when an agency was proposed, no matter the specific constellation of opponents and their tactics. The opposition was too wide and too deep.

Part of what emerges from a close look at the politics of legislation in 1936-7 is a clearer view of what were the commonalities across the Pacific Northwest that could hold together the necessary pieces of the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest – the four states of the would-be region, both cities and agricultural areas, and the various parts of the federal government – in the face of political strife. Most important was a shared desire for economic development: all parties wanted their cities, their constituents, their farms, their agencies, to get a piece of the bounty that federal development of the Columbia River offered. But many also held genuine concerns for wider benefit – and these concerns were made more poignant and more committed by the Depression. As in the development of the conception of the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest, in the development of legislation, too, ideals and self-interested strategy were entwined. Conflict erupted when one's ideals or self-interest interfered with another's. The problem with a regional program was precisely that: it tried to create a collective vision that too many inside the collective did not see as particularly beneficial. The PNWRPC had found the *most* agreeable, most advantageous regional definition it could – but when that regional definition began to suggest specific legislation, too many parts wanted to get out of the whole. In particular, the upstream states of Idaho and Montana tried to keep their waters – and their hopes for federal development dollars – from being subsumed into a broad regional vision that could be dominated by the population and economic centers in

Oregon and Washington. Though the PNWRPC tried to accommodate their concerns by narrowing its recommendations to a power-only agency, this turned out not to help; it simply refocused the existing upriver states' anxieties onto hydropower as the priority that might claim their waters or threaten their hopes for funds for expanded irrigation.

As is typical of the political process, compromise was found where necessary in narrowing the vision and making specifics vague. Thus the PNWRPC's recommended Pacific Northwest Power Agency was narrowed to an agency that would administer only the power from a single dam. But once this essential compromise was made in 1936, the chief proponents of a regional agency, including President Roosevelt himself, were able to put back in a few key regional and regionalist provisions: the authority to connect transmission lines to other Columbia River projects, the ability to set uniform rates, and a directive to achieve the widest possible use. One other provision would be critical too: the Bonneville Power Administrator was to be appointed by the Secretary of the Interior. With Roosevelt and Secretary Ickes in office for another eight years, this meant that the new agency would be guided by appointees of strong supporters of Pacific Northwest regionalism during its critical years of institutionalization. They would push the young agency far in the direction of the regional and regionalist potential Congress had given it.

CHAPTER IV

INSTITUTIONALIZATION:

THE BPA BUILDS A REGION, 1937-1945

[T]he basis in public opinion does not exist either in the Pacific Northwest or, so far as we may observe, in the Nation as whole for a frontal attack by Government planning agencies upon the known or putative causes of [the Depression]. In the meantime, if planners are to avoid the Scylla of extinction or the Charybdis of mere day-dreaming, they must restrict their scope to the area within which they may secure results. If this area does not contain 'the city of God,' it may yet permit the perpetuation of life as we have known it, with perhaps a few added opportunities.

....It is possible that the method used for handling the electric energy that wells out the Columbia at Bonneville, Grand Coulee, and the other projected dams may facilitate the attainment in some degree of broad social objectives. They may furnish a new important stimulus to regional thinking, particularly if they 'sweeten' the thinking process with widely shared material benefits and demonstrate, by their effective management, the superiority of the cooperative method of solving many... difficulties.... (PNWRPC, Columbia Basin Study, 1935, in NRC 1936, 152-3)

INTRODUCTION

In the short eight-year time span between 1937 and 1945, the BPA, despite its initial limitations as a one-dam, power-only federal agency, defied all expectations and plans, and survived, adapted, and grew itself into a regional power agency for much of the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest. To a considerable extent it also became a regional planning agency, a regional coordinating agency, and a shared regional booster.

It came to encompass most of the PNWRPC's envisioned three-and-a-half-state regional territory, indelibly linked this region to the Columbia River, and took on many of the PNWRPC's ideals. The BPA institutionalized the framework for lasting regional organization, and instilled widely a vision of this Pacific Northwest as a region whose bond to its river, the Columbia, was the key to social and environmental well-being.

Nonetheless, regionalist practice was narrowed, focused and reframed in order for the new agency to survive politically. The vision of the good life and shared prosperity was largely reduced to a goal of wide distribution of inexpensive electricity and the promotion of widespread economic development. Intra-regional ties were woven not from the interdependence of rural and urban, society and resources, but from the shared economic bounty of cheap federal Columbia River power, a regional federal transmission grid, and a regional federal agency which, positioning itself as a regional Chamber of Commerce, recruited industry and further federal investment. The different parts of the region were woven together through their shared relationship to the Columbia River, but the primary shared relationship was to the *developed* river, and to the dams which began to multiply into what would become the Federal Columbia River Power System. Conservation of resources, including fisheries and scenic areas, remained important, but in application conservation meant mainly the use of river water upstream as well as downstream, the building and funding of fish hatcheries, and the restriction of industry from tourist vistas.

In this chapter, I trace the regional and regionalist policies, practices and achievements of the new BPA during its formative first eight years. Foregoing the kind of intricate political analysis of Chapter 3, I build mainly from existing secondary sources, both published and unpublished, to paint a relatively broad-brush view of the dominant political pressures and changing political tides which shaped the agency's policies and practice.¹ I focus on the development of regional visions, organization, policies, relationships, and infrastructure.

1. The secondary works on which I leaned most heavily were three volumes of an unpublished BPA history by Lillian Davis, covering the years 1937 through 1945 (Davis 1945a, 1944, 1945b); an unpublished memoir by Samuel Moment, an employee of the BPA from 1940 to 1954 (Moment [1990?]), and the classic and comprehensive history of the BPA by Gus Norwood, *Columbia River Power for the People* (BPA 1980). I also repeatedly referenced

The chapter is divided into three distinct sections, reflecting profound shifts in policy leadership and wider political pressure: first, an examination of BPA's first year and a half under Administrator J.D. Ross ("Visions and Divisions of Public Power: J.D. Ross, 1937-9"); second, the first two years, and particularly the first six months, of Administrator Paul Raver's tenure, during which BPA undertook major policy changes to accommodate political necessity – even before the war became a major influence on the BPA ("Paul Raver Finds BPA's Niche: Regional Chamber of Commerce, 1939-40"); and third, the war years ("A Nation at War Connects a Region, 1941-45").

VISIONS & DIVISIONS OF PUBLIC POWER: J.D. ROSS, 1937-39

BPA's² first administrator, JD Ross, was very supportive of efforts to create a regional power agency in the Pacific Northwest, and he was sympathetic with several core regionalist aims. As described in Chapter 3, he had been present at the senate hearings on the Bonneville bill in 1936. He also participated in the 1937 House hearings (Columbia River (Bonneville Dam), Oreg. and Wash. 1937). Both times he testified in favor of broad sales of very cheap power, arguing that this would enable a rise in demand that would make low rates economical, while providing benefits to a broad public. Low rates could help decentralize industry and population, far preferable to the social evils of "overcentralization" (Navigation and flood control on the Columbia River and its tributaries 1936, 131). He also saw himself as a committed conservationist, and supported efforts to establish a Columbia Valley Authority (Jordan 1991, Dick 1973).

two other foundational works, Daniel Ogden's 1949 dissertation, *The Development of Federal Power Policy in the Pacific Northwest* (Ogden 1949), and Charles McKinley's 1952 magnum opus, *Uncle Sam in the Pacific Northwest* (McKinley 1952). Several other original works on this time period informed my basic understandings, even if their pages were not as often the ones I flipped through for factual details; these include works by Herman Voeltz (1960; 1962), Wesley Arden Dick (1973; 1989), and Myron Jordan (1991). I was also able to interview two people who lived through this era themselves.

2. The agency was not actually called the Bonneville Power Administration during Ross's tenure, but for simplicity's sake I have called it that or its abbreviation, the BPA, throughout. For the agency's first two years it was called the Bonneville Project, after the act which had created it. The problem was that this name was also often used for the Bonneville Dam. Especially once President Roosevelt designated the agency to be responsible for Grand Coulee power as well, the need for a new name for the agency became obvious. The name of the agency was made to match that of its Administrator under the act, hence the Bonneville Power Administration (Davis 1945a).

His crusade was not for regions, however, but rather for public power. Power generated and transmitted by the federal government, and retailed by local governments and rural cooperatives, was in Ross's mind the key to achieving broad social purpose, spreading benefits to a wide public, and conserving resources for future generations. Ross was nationally known for his long leadership of Seattle City Light, a public utility which had operated side by side with the private Puget Sound Power and Light. Seattle City Light had forced PSP&L's rates down, step by step, in order to compete in the Seattle area, and the city utility went on to fight for the right to sell inexpensive electricity outside of the city (Dick 1973; see also Jordan 1991; Ogden 1949).³ To the extent that Ross as BPA administrator advanced regional organization and supported regionalist goals such as industrial decentralization and resource conservation, he tied them tightly and lastingly to the effort to spread cheap power far and wide and to put it under the control of government.

Ross's "Regional" Policy and Regionalist Practice

Ross did three major things that publicly, visibly, and often controversially pushed the BPA toward being a regional and somewhat regionalist agency; less visibly and less controversially, he did several more as well.

First, he designated "postage stamp rates" for electricity – cheap rates equal across the BPA territory. This was the resolution of the long battle between Portland and its hoped-for special access to cheap Bonneville Dam power versus much of the rest of the Pacific Northwest. By appointing Ross, Roosevelt had made the winner clear (Dick 1973). Ross's first rate schedule, which was modified only slightly over the next several decades (Lee, Klemka, and Marts 1980), made rates slightly cheaper near the dam, but only slightly. Rates anywhere BPA sold power were set at rates lower than anyone in the country had even dreamed of before – and thus gave Portland little advantage over anywhere else in the BPA service region, and industry no advantage over other power

3. In 1931 Ross had proved himself more popular in Seattle than the mayor. When Seattle's mayor had fired Ross, citing Ross's over-involvement in politics and his unwillingness to work with the city, Ross and the supporters of Seattle City Light had run a massive campaign to recall the mayor, positioning Ross as the champion of the people, public power as the means of their deliverance from usurious business and government interested only in profit. The mayor had been recalled and Ross reinstated the next day (Jordan 1991; Dick 1973).

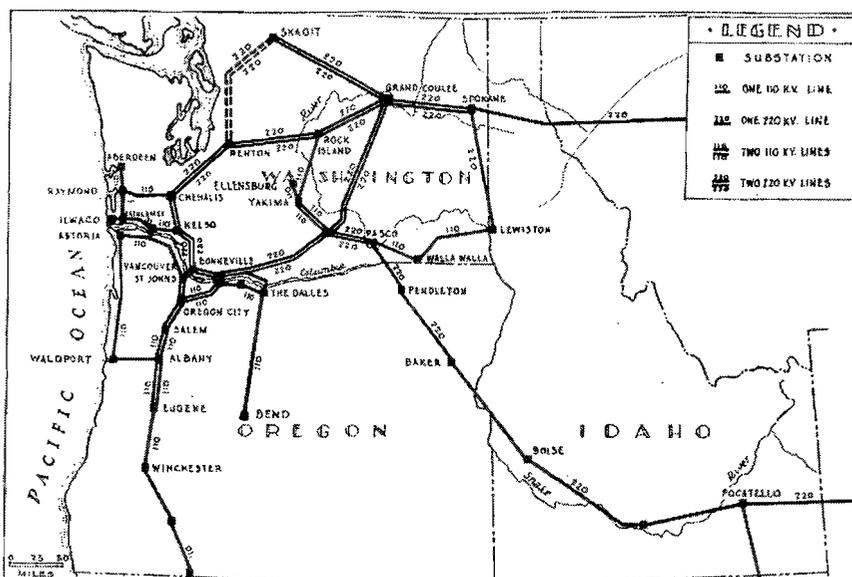
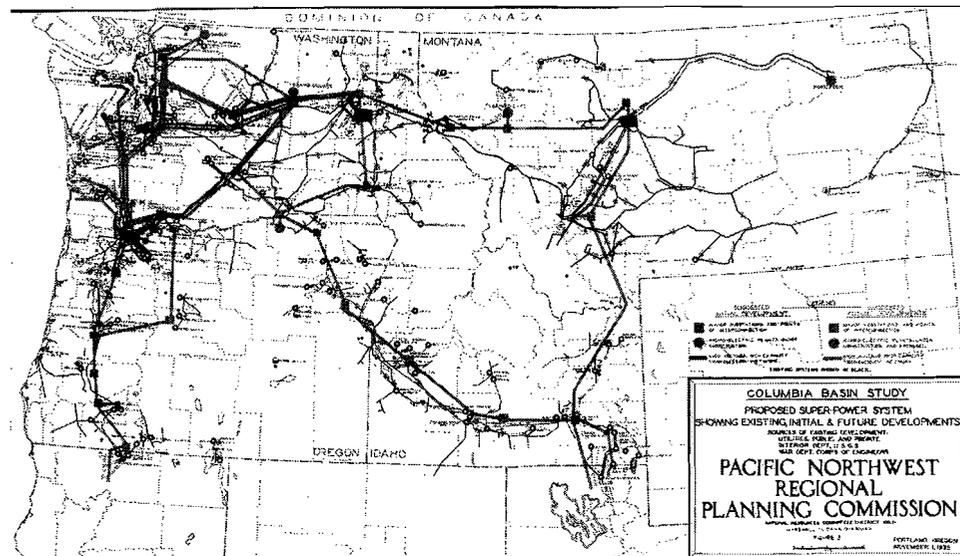
uses. Rather, the key advantage accrued to the *entire* BPA service region in comparison with other parts of the country (Davis 1945a; Ogden 1949; McKinley 1952).

An official chronicler of BPA's early years called this the "regional" policy – not regional in the sense of encompassing a set geographical area, but regional as opposed to local (Davis 1944; see also Dick 1973). "Regional" meant spreading power out from urban areas to anyone who needed it, to support the modernization and betterment of rural life, and the decentralization of industry (Davis 1944; Dick 1973).

The second way Ross pushed the BPA to become more regional was perhaps even more binding for subsequent administrators than his rates policy. He hired engineer Charles Carey from the PNWRPC and soon appointed him as chief engineer.⁴ Carey was given the task of designing the BPA grid. Carey then led the BPA transmission team as it began planning almost exactly the regional grid he had laid out for the PNWRPC (figure 4.1). BPA soon began acquiring land to get ready for the Portland, Vancouver, Grand Coulee, Eugene and Kelso lines (Davis 1945a).

Thirdly, to considerable acclaim but also controversy, Ross promoted public power as the vehicle to achieve widespread social benefit. He envisioned an entirely public power region. He believed customers of private utilities would all eventually choose to form public utilities, and BPA power could provide for these utilities throughout the Pacific Northwest (Navigation and flood control on the Columbia River and its tributaries 1936). He supported this revolution: he put other leading public power advocates in leading positions (Ogden 1949), gave speeches about the great things federal wholesale power could bring, and he actively promoted the creation of local public electric utilities in local and state elections. He signed contracts with and built transmission lines to newly formed public utility districts, electric utilities in local and state elections. He signed contracts with and built transmission lines to newly formed public utility districts, to help get them get running successfully; and he supported their efforts to build power distribution systems and customer bases (Davis 1945a; Ogden 1949; Jordan 1991). No administrator after Ross was quite so zealous about public

4. Carey would also briefly become acting Administrator during Ross's illness in early 1939, and continued when Ross died, until the Secretary of Interior had the chance to appoint a new administrator (Davis 1945a).



J.D. Ross Master Plan, 1938

Figure 4.1. The planned BPA grid under Administrator Ross, 1938 (lower map). *Source:* Tollefson 1987, 135. Despite the fact that the BPA was authorized at first to manage the power only for Bonneville Dam, the agency immediately planned a transmission grid that would allow it to connect with Grand Coulee Dam, and to transmit and sell power throughout the three-and-a-half-state Columbia River's Pacific Northwest. Ross's BPA planned a core grid triangle that would connect Bonneville Dam in northwestern Oregon, Puget Sound in northwestern Washington, and Grand Coulee Dam in eastern Washington, and could then send power out through spur lines in other directions. The BPA's plan followed closely the power grid proposed by the PNWRPC for a regional "superpower" agency (above, NRC 1936, 40). The close similarity of the two planned grids is no coincidence: both were planned by Charles Carey, who was hired by the BPA from the PNWRPC.

power, but in one and a half years Ross institutionalized the public preference clause in the Bonneville Project Act into a deep and long-lasting identity and interdependence between BPA and multitudinous public and cooperative utilities throughout the Pacific Northwest (Lee, Klemka, and Marts 1980).

Other than these more visible actions, Ross did several more things that showed his fundamental support for a regional and regionalist BPA destiny. He held public hearings in the state capitals of Washington, Oregon and Idaho, and in other sites in eastern and western Washington and Oregon before he set rates (Davis 1945a; Ogden 1949).⁵ To break the Pacific Northwest's dependence on other regions, he sought to support the processing of Pacific Northwest raw materials within the region (Davis 1944).⁶ He assumed and practiced regional autonomy for the BPA itself: Ross located the agency's main office in Portland, and relied on his close association with an extensive network of public power utilities and advocates in the Pacific Northwest rather than consultation with his higher-ups in the Interior Department.⁷ Ross committed to support fish ladders and hatcheries⁸, and supported protection of the Columbia River Gorge (Davis 1945a; Moment [1990?]).

5. This was a strategic move as much as it was a reflection of a belief in public participation. It was a way to garner political support for his "regional" power policy – that is, uniform or postage stamp rates. The state capital and eastern Washington and Oregon hearings were completed before Portland interests had even had a chance to get mobilized to fight in this new arena of administrative rather than Congressional politics (Ogden 1949). By the time Portland interests spoke out for distance-tiered rates at its own hearing, it was too late: regional opinion had spoken (Ogden 1949). Outside of Portland, only in the Boise hearing was there voiced any real opposition to BPA power (Davis 1945a).

Hearings were all in March, 1938, in the following order: Salem, Oregon; Olympia; Boise; Pendleton, Oregon; Walla Walla, Washington; Spokane; Yakima, Washington; Portland. Ross also canvassed governors, Congressmen, state planning and utility commissions; and newspaper readers (Davis 1945a).

6. Samuel Moment, employee of the BPA beginning in 1940, relates in his memoir that Ross tried to recruit two processing industries to use Bonneville power but was unsuccessful. Moment's knowledge of BPA under Ross came from conversations and a long-term friendship with his BPA boss, Ivan Bloch (Moment [1990?]).

7. Moment reveals that Ross was *very* insular and essentially never consulted with Secretary Ickes (Moment [1990?]). Ross was, however, appointed to Secretary of Interior Ickes' Advisory Committee on Power (Davis 1945a). Despite Ross's insularity, BPA would eventually have influence on federal administration policy on power and the Pacific Northwest that was disproportionately large compared to other federal agencies working in the Pacific Northwest and on the Columbia River such as the Bureau of Reclamation. This was because the BPA was its own federal agency, not a regional office of a national-scale federal agency (McKinley 1952).

8. Bonneville Dam had already been built by the Army Corps of Engineers with fish ladders. Power for a new Bonneville fish hatchery would come from the dam – although the State of Oregon would have to pay for it. Once it was seen that fish successfully ascended Bonneville Dam's fish ladder, and fish moved from above Grand Coulee Dam returned to their new hatchery, BPA considered "the fish question... completely settled" (Davis 1945ap. III-51).

An Uneven Region

Yet Ross's support for public power – meant to bring a basic resource to all people, unifying them with social betterment – divided as well. In the name of the Bonneville Project Act's preference clause, Ross promised to build transmission lines first to those areas with public utilities (Davis 1945a). The private utilities did not take kindly to this kind of activism (Ogden 1949). Even more galling was Ross's open advocacy in the 1938 election for the creation of local public utilities in Oregon and Washington. Both Oregon and Washington had laws allowing the formation of Public (Washington) or People's (Oregon) Utility Districts (either way, PUDs), but Washington's law made the formation of PUDs much easier. In 1938, many Washington counties voted on whether to create PUDs, while a statewide referendum in Oregon proposed to ease formation of PUDs there (Davis 1945a; see also Ogden 1949).⁹ After many Washington counties voted in PUDs but the Oregon measure failed, Ross said in early 1939 that for Oregon to receive "the fullest benefits of Bonneville power," it must revise its law (Davis 1945a, III-33). Over the next few years as Oregon failed to revise its PUD law, and attempts to create PUDs in Oregon mostly failed, it became clear what state *would* receive the fullest share of Bonneville benefits: Washington. Thus public power advocacy both polarized politics and differentiated parts of the region according to territorial control of local areas by private or public utilities.

For the upriver states, public-versus-private power politics compounded the difficulties of distance, Ross's lack of interest, and their initial ambivalence about joining a Pacific Northwest regional power system.

Ross's BPA worked mainly in Washington and Oregon. The focus on the two states bordering Bonneville Dam cannot be blamed on Ross – Ross's planned grid

9. Davis (1945a: III-33 - 50), the official BPA chronicler of the years between 1937 and 1945, goes into considerable detail on the advantages and disadvantages of the two states' laws, and the political alliances and events which shaped them and the 1938 elections. Other authors, clearly supportive of BPA against its private utility opponents, suggest the private utilities exaggerated, even fabricated, Ross's political advocacy (Ogden 1949; BPA 1980). Davis's detailed analysis suggest that the BPA's involvement in these 1938 political campaigns was not a made-up accusation foisted on the agency by bitter private utilities. Davis herself also clearly contrasts Raver's approach (see next section). On the other hand, the evidence is clear that the private utilities were engaged in heavy political campaigning themselves (Ogden 1949 covers this particularly well). See Jordan (1991) for an analysis of the mutual public relations wars undertaken by the two sides.

enabled the transmission of power at least as far as northern Idaho – so much as on the initial limitations of the Bonneville Project Act, with its focus on Bonneville Dam. But even when Ross talked about his goals for the region, reached out to gain public opinion, and when BPA printed out pamphlets about the agency during Ross’s tenure, he and the agency emphasized only the *three* states of Washington, Oregon and Idaho. Unlike his successor Raver (see below), Ross did not adopt the PNWRPC’s conception of the geography of the Pacific Northwest – nor did Ross invite close collaboration with the PNWRPC (Davis 1945a).¹⁰ Ross’s conception of BPA’s “region” was more about how far transmission lines could be built and power sold economically, not on some predetermined regional geography (Navigation and flood control on the Columbia River and its tributaries 1936).

Adding to these existing disparities of BPA attention, neither Idaho nor Montana had PUD laws at all, and ultimately they would not pass them either. Thus the only utilities that could be served in those states were rural cooperatives and municipal utilities.¹¹ Thus, while Oregon was fast becoming second to Washington even in Ross’s short tenure, Idaho’s status in terms of its incorporation into BPA’s region was already clearly below Oregon’s, and Montana’s a distant fourth.

Divisive Regionalism

These divisions were destructive. As Ross began to establish BPA as an increasingly regional – as opposed to local – institution with some regionalist principles, the agency was also facing a host of political challenges. Regional and local newspapers printed withering criticism, and many in Congress voiced growing scorn. The main target of criticism was BPA’s failure to sell its power. Although Bonneville Dam had come on line in early 1938 and was producing prodigious amounts of power, the Bonneville

10. Moment says Ross disparaged the PNWRPC’s reports as too long and convoluted (Moment [1990?]).

11. The Idaho Power Company convinced Idaho voters to turn down a PUD measure in <??? what yr> (Stacy 1991). Even rural cooperatives and the REA were fought off in much of eastern Washington and southern Idaho by the aggressive tactics of Washington Water Power Company and the Idaho Power Company (Stacy 1991; Egan 1990; Ogden 1949). Not all private companies fought so hard against the establishment of public utilities and electric cooperatives. In southern Washington, several small private companies sold out to newly formed PUDs with little fight (Ogden 1949). In western Montana, a private power company assisted struggling REA coops to get set up (Busch 1976).

Project was selling only a small portion. Most of the power went unused. There were two reasons for this delay in power sales, one of which was beyond the BPA's control and one of which was not. First, appropriations for transmission had been late, and the agency simply could not build lines in time to get the dam's first few months of power anywhere other than a tiny local utility, which transmitted power on its own lines. Second and more problematic in the minds of critics, Ross's interpretation of public preference was to prioritize transmission lines for and contracts with public utilities, and to expend considerable agency resources supporting political campaigns to establish public utility districts, and helping newly created public utilities get set up. These priorities came before building transmission lines for and making contracts with private utilities and industry. But public power utilities were sprouting up neither quickly nor evenly across the region, and where they had been supported by voters they often did not have the resources to build distribution systems to get power delivered to customers.

Unfortunately for Ross, Bessey's prediction about what would be needed to sell large volumes of power quickly proved accurate. It was the private utilities which were set up and ready to use Bonneville Dam's new power, and large industrial customers that offered the potential to consume even more. But Ross would not facilitate power sales to private utilities save in exceptional circumstances. Ross's initial sales contracts included two private utilities, but these were considered emergency contracts, and were one written for only one year.¹² Nor was Ross working hard to recruit energy-intensive industry, which he saw as too linked in interest to Portland's local ambitions and to private utilities. Critics accused Bonneville and Ross of wasting the great resource of the Bonneville Dam in the name of ideological politics (Davis 1945a, 1945b; Moment [1990?]).

BPA faced other problems under Ross's leadership. While Ross was widely admired in Seattle and around the country for his leadership of Seattle City Light, it seems that at BPA, at least, he was not a very good manager. While he let chief engineer Carey plan the BPA grid, he tried to control other aspects of BPA operations. Talented staff members who had come to BPA inspired by its great potential now were told to let

12. These were PGE – BPA's first large contract – and Northwestern Power (Davis 1945a).

Ross take the lead – and then had to watch him refuse to take the steps they saw as essential to agency development (Moment [1990?]; Davis 1945a).

It seems possible that if Ross had remained administrator, BPA would have stayed true to its commitment to provide power to “the people” – rural farmers and urban households – while promoting conservation and only gradual industrial development. It also seems possible that the agency would have been terminated as were so many New Deal agencies when they could not meet the disparate demands of different economic interests, different external and internal political factions. Samuel Moment, who worked for the BPA from 1940 to 1954, suggests in his memoir that if Ross had continued to lead BPA, it would have continued with only minimal power sales, and would soon have had to raise the price of power. This would have undermined its credibility and compelled Congressional action. The agency might have been dismantled by Congress, its power and transmission lines given over to private industry. Indeed, it could have threatened the credibility of the whole federal power program, which rested on claims that government power could lower electric rates (Moment [1990?]; Davis 1945a).¹³

But Ross became gravely ill in January, 1939, and died in March, only about a year and a half after the agency was created. After a short seven-month period in which BPA was led by two interim administrators,¹⁴ Ross was replaced by a man who was more politically savvy and strategic, and a good manager as well, Dr. Paul Raver.

13. The threat to the federal power program – and indeed to the momentum of the remaining New Deal programs – was great enough it seems likely that Ross would not have been allowed to stay on for too much longer. Moment indicates that Secretary Ickes knew that Bonneville was ‘a mess’ (Moment [1990?]: 5.20). FDR might have been forced to fire Ross, as he had TVA’s Arthur Morgan in 1938. But that would have been a politically damaging outcome itself.

14. These were Charles Carey, named acting administrator when Ross became ill, and Frank Banks, who served from May to September. Davis and Moment suggest that neither administrator was popular with his staff. The BPA under Carey was disorganized – in part because no one knew who the permanent administrator would be and internal frictions from Ross’s era still simmered. Banks was borrowed from the Bureau of Reclamation and opposed the vision for BPA shared by most staff. He opposed low rates for federal power, wanting power rates to subsidize irrigation instead; and he had little interest in regional development (Moment [1990?]; Davis 1945a). See also next section.

PAUL RAVER FINDS BPA'S NICHE: REGIONAL CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, 1939-40

The BPA under Paul Raver was markedly different from the BPA under J.D. Ross. Paul Raver started his post as BPA administrator in September, 1939, one week after Germany invaded Poland (McKinley 1952), so from the moment he began the agency had to anticipate the changed needs in power that US entry into war might bring. The war would soon so transform the agency, the region and the river that it is hard to separate out other influences during Raver's early tenure. This section tries to do precisely that, though, in order to illuminate the other influences that shaped BPA's relationship to the PNWRPC's regional and regionalist vision during Raver's early tenure. My strategy is to focus not only on the period before the US officially entered the war in December 1941, or indirectly entered the war with the Lend Lease Law in May 1941, but more importantly, on the few months before Raver himself joined the National Power Policy Committee and realized that selling BPA power to war industries could be the BPA's golden opportunity. I argue that Raver's BPA, out of its own initiative and also thanks to the continuing efforts of the PNWRPC and its new nonprofit spin-off, the Northwest Regional Council, pushed hard toward becoming an agency which could lead in the effort to build and support the Columbia River-centered Pacific Northwest. Very quickly, though, even before BPA oriented itself to providing for war, both internal and external pressures began to narrow this effort to a primary focus on selling power and recruiting industry throughout the region. Both the push toward region and regionalism, and its narrowing, left indelible marks on the agency, the region, and the river.

Raver Comes to BPA

When Paul Raver became Bonneville Power Administrator in the fall of 1939, the BPA was a troubled agency. Although the construction of its transmission grid had finally begun under the two interim administrators earlier that year, and its sales contracts were slowly growing, Bonneville Dam's power remained largely unused, and BPA

continued to take the blame for this. The second interim administrator, Banks, had taken a different approach to public power advocacy from Ross's, but it had not helped matters. In contrast to Ross's strong advocacy for public power, which had angered and embittered private power executives, Portland leaders, and industrial interests, Banks displayed an acute lack of support for public power and made BPA's most ardent supporters feel abandoned and betrayed. Nearly everyone was primed, then, to jump on the new administrator in anger and blame, should he take one step in the wrong direction. To make matters worse, the conflicts within the agency that had begun under Ross's tenure remained unresolved. Grumbling was loud, and morale was low (Moment [1990?]; Davis 1945a).

Raver seemed an unknown quantity. He was not from the Pacific Northwest, nor was he an activist. He was an academic, a professor from Northwestern who had specialized in public power. Though his work was a public matter, it was nonetheless unclear how he would operate as the administrator of a federal power agency in the Pacific Northwest. Given all the tumult experienced already in the Bonneville Project's brief two years in existence, few were confident that Raver could provide Bonneville Project with what it needed to survive and thrive as an institution (Davis 1945a).

But Raver could, and he did. Paul Raver turned out to be a savvy strategist and an excellent manager. He retained, brought and hired excellent staff, listened to them, and gave them the reins to work. He continued to support the establishment of public utilities, and moved BPA into the effort to help publics acquire the power distribution infrastructure of competing private utilities, but he curbed the most aggressive confrontations with private utilities (Davis 1945b; Moment [1990?]; Ogden 1949). Most importantly for BPA's future, Raver deflated others' criticisms of the agency by actively and successfully recruiting industrial customers. It had become clear that the key to institutional survival was to sell BPA's power – as much of it as possible, as soon as possible. This meant recruiting in particular those industries which needed huge volumes of power to operate. Today, the notion of devoting Columbia River power to electricity-gobbling industry seems antithetical to goals of wide social benefit and environmental

stewardship. They were not at all opposed in 1939, however. Indeed, BPA's industrial recruitment program began as perhaps the most regional and regionalist program of all.

Political Strategy Joins Regionalism in BPA's Industrial Sales Program

Under Raver, BPA's approach to its region drew heavily from the work of the PNWRPC. But how Raver's BPA applied the PNWRPC vision was influenced by a clear-headed analysis of what BPA would need to do to retain regional and Congressional support. Secondary was a legal appraisal of the limits to BPA's statutory authority. Although the coming war would play a role before long, it was not a central influence in how the program was conceptualized and begun.

A strategy for BPA's political survival was brought together with the PNWRPC vision by BPA's Market Development Section head, Ivan Bloch. Before coming to BPA, Bloch had worked in Washington DC for the Rural Electrification Administration and for the National Resources Committee (NRC). His work for the NRC had been with the Water Resources Committee, and he was deeply familiar with the PNWRPC's Columbia Basin Study and with the NRC's other work on river basin development. He had come to BPA hoping to be able to work on developing a program for the shared administration of Bonneville and Grand Coulee Dams (Moment [1990?]). In short, from the start, he had saw the BPA as a core part of a Columbia River-centered regional planning, conservation and development program, and hoped to further this aim. He had deep respect for Roy Bessey and Charles McKinley, finding them to be 'two men who have thought more about development of the Columbia on a broad base than any others in the region' (Moment [1990?], 5.20).¹⁵

Bloch also had close personal relationships with the man leading BPA's small Washington D.C. office, J. Perry Alvey. Near the end of Ross's tenure, Alvey had expressed serious concern about BPA's future. Alvey said that BPA was facing increasing opposition from private utilities and a more conservative Congress. Some in Congress were already suggesting a Congressional investigation of BPA, as had been

15. Bloch had actually been hired by Ross in July 1938, and in December of that year had been made head of the Market Development Section. Nonetheless, Ross had not allowed him to take any real initiative. Raver, on the other hand, talked to Bloch for thirty minutes, and told him to go ahead (Moment [1990?]).

undertaken for the TVA. Even the Bureau of the Budget opposed further appropriations for Bonneville transmission lines unless the agency successfully negotiated more sales contracts. Alvey told Bloch that political opposition threatened to stop the BPA program in its tracks, but that if BPA could execute several large industrial sales contracts it could alleviate the pressure (Moment [1990?]).

Alvey and Bloch were freed to act by the leadership vacuum that followed Ross's death. They took it upon themselves to promote sales of BPA power to industry. Bloch provided Alvey with data on Pacific Northwest mineral resources, possible industrial sites, and names of companies that might be induced to relocate. Bloch took over Ross's role marketing BPA's power. He quickly changed the emphasis from that of Ross. In a speech in Ohio in April, 1939, Bloch garnered tremendous interest by publicizing the low rates and volumes at which BPA electricity could be offered to industry (Moment [1990?]; see also Davis 1945b).

But Bloch's enthusiasm about industrial sales was not simply about BPA's political survival. He also saw BPA's marketing to industry as a central program to further the PNWRPC's regional and regionalist vision – and he had the collaboration and enthusiasm of the central authors of that vision.

The PNWRPC had for several years been trying to get the money to undertake a regional industrial survey. Its staff and members hoped that a detailed survey of the region could illuminate opportunities for more diversified and dispersed industry that could ease the Pacific Northwest's colonial-like dependence on Eastern capital and manufactured goods, and spread industry spatially out to smaller cities and more remote areas (Dana to Ickes, September 7, 1934, NRPB Records; Bessey, Minutes of PNWRPC meeting, March 2, 1935, NRPB Records). But the NRC had declined the PNWRPC's request in 1935 (NRC, Minutes, Advisory Committee, June 30, 1935, McKinley Papers), and had itself lost funding beginning in 1937 (Bessey 1937; NRC 1938). Now, it seemed possible that the BPA might fund such a survey, if the PNWRPC could convince the agency of the merits of the idea.

Though the PNWRPC was weakened in 1939 compared to its earlier years, its nonprofit spin-off, the Northwest Regional Council, was now running strong. The

Northwest Regional Council had been founded in 1938 by Bessey, McKinley and others as an organization that could bridge the gap between planners, government agency officials of various jurisdictions, and educational and research establishments. In many ways it was designed to promote the understandings and research embodied in the Columbia Basin Study, and to further similar research. Its organizers won a Rockefeller Foundation grant, and, in the organization's few short years of existence between 1938 and 1944, it was remarkably prolific and influential. It involved several of the region's major research universities in developing regional research and education (Bessey 1963), published or contributed to texts on the Pacific Northwest (e.g. Appleton 1943; King and Fullenwider 1938), supported education about the Pacific Northwest in public schools (e.g. Northwest Regional Council 1940b), produced non-technical summary versions of PNWRPC reports (e.g. Northwest Regional Council 1941, 1940a), and produced or contributed to authoritative regional atlases (e.g. Northwest Regional Council 1942).¹⁶ In 1939, it was a natural partner for the PNWRPC and the BPA in putting together an industrial survey of the Pacific Northwest.

In June 1939, Bloch, Bessey and McKinley, respectively representing the BPA, the PNWRPC and the Northwest Regional Council, wrote a letter to interim Administrator Banks. The three organizations proposed jointly to undertake a regional industrial survey (Bessey, McKinley, and Bloch to Administrator Banks proposing industrial survey, June 20, 1939, McKinley Papers).

Both sales contracts and industrial surveys began soon after Raver took office. In August, 1939, Raver sent two men ahead of him to talk to BPA staff about what would be needed. They were specifically instructed that the first person they should talk to was Ivan Bloch, and they offered immediate support for Bloch's efforts (Moment [1990?]).¹⁷ In November, the BPA, the PNWRPC and the Northwest Regional Council officially

16. It seems likely that it was the Northwest Regional Council which solidified the PNWRPC's conception of the Pacific Northwest region among regional authorities and furthered the conception of the Columbia River-centered Pacific Northwest for several decades past the publication of the Columbia Basin Study. In 1954, for example, a compilation about the region that included contributions from many academics (Freeman and Martin 1954) was edited by the same editors who had edited the 1942 regional "economic geography" text to which the Northwest Regional Council had contributed (Freeman and Martin 1942).

17. These were James Metcalf and Sol Shultz, and their instructions came from Joel Wolfsohn, who was working in Ickes' office and had been in close contact with Bloch for several years (Moment [1990?]).

joined in a “broad program for a cooperative economic and industrial survey of the Pacific Northwest with a view to stimulating the area's development through the use of low cost Columbia River power” (Davis 1945b, I-17). The first major industrial contract was signed the next month, in December 1939. The Aluminum Company of America, or Alcoa, would use BPA power to operate a new plant to be built in Vancouver, Washington (Moment [1990?]; Davis 1945b; BPA 1980). This contract was a major morale boost to BPA staff, and to many outside supporters as well. They realized power sales were key to the agency’s economic and political survival. But they saw the Alcoa contract as something greater. In 1991, a BPA lawyer from that era recalled that the Alcoa contract “brought to life the hopes that people had had that the development of the Columbia River power system would bring in new industry and help to diversify the economic basis for the Region” (Hart 1991).

It is easy to look back from an early twenty-first century vantage-point, and to dismiss this idealistic view of industrial power sales as naïve. Surely, regional business leaders and big industry were motivated in part simply to improve their own profits, not to further widely shared regional well-being. The 1939 Alcoa contract in particular suggests the victory of Portland’s locally self-centered version of regional development against the PNWRPC’s vision of more spatially distributed development, since the plant was to locate just across the river from Portland.

But the industrial surveys undertaken jointly by the BPA, PNWRPC and Northwest Regional Council show that BPA’s industrial sales were indeed still tied deeply, centrally, to a much broader and wider regional mission and vision, one which was a direct inheritance from the PNWRPC.

The industrial surveys began in early 1940 and were completed in 1947.¹⁸ They were organized by area: the first survey covered sites along the Columbia River from Astoria at the river’s mouth to The Dalles (some two hundred miles) (BPA 1940), the

18. McKinley (1952) says the final study was published in 1943, and that none extended to Idaho or Montana. But Moment describes surveys lasting into 1947, and all the way into western Montana (Moment [1990?]); and indeed there were surveys published in the late 1940s on these upriver state areas. It appears these later surveys were not structured the same way as the earlier ones. In the immediate postwar period, much of BPA’s survey work contributed to the Army Corps’ comprehensive update of prospects for Columbia River development; the Corps’ report confirms this (U.S. Army Engineer Division North Pacific Division 1958; Bessey 1963; McKinley 1952; Moment [1990?]).

next much of the mid-Columbia Basin (McKinley 1952). Letters were sent to Chambers of Commerce, and to other important educational and civic institutions and leaders. BPA employees followed the letters, getting to know the wide expanse that was called the “Pacific Northwest region” and its people. They collected data on factors that might support industrial plants including resources, markets, agriculture, economic trends, labor, and transportation infrastructure. They organized local committees to help advise and inform their reports (Davis 1945b; Moment [1990?]; Davis 1944; McKinley 1952). The resulting surveys showed detailed maps of towns with possible locations for industry labeled (figure 4.2), and accompanying charts on resources and costs, from transportation to taxes to labor (BPA 1940).

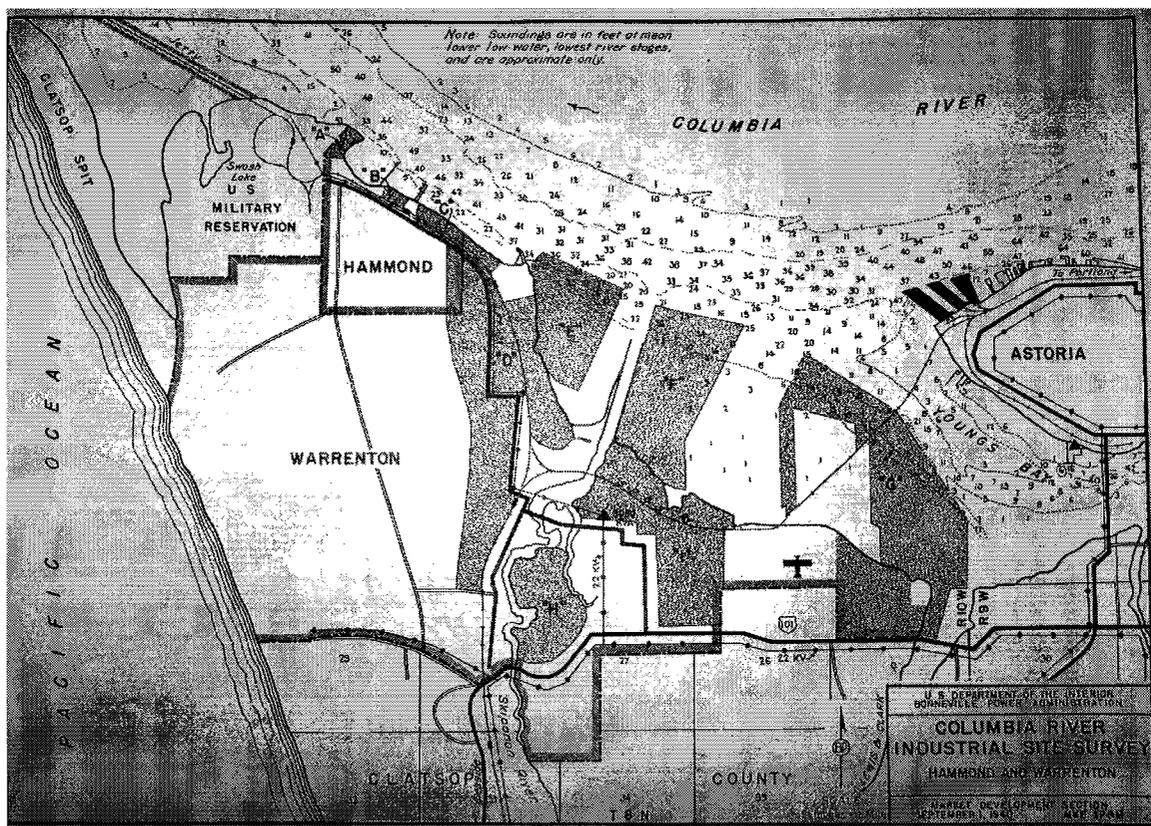


Figure 4.2 Industrial site survey from Hammon and Warrenton, Oregon, at the mouth of the Columbia River. *Source:* BPA 1940.

In other words, the surveys followed closely on the work of the PNWRPC. The BPA's research methods were much like those evidenced by the PNWRPC's earlier work – only the BPA had the resources to work at a much finer geographic resolution. BPA employees familiarized themselves with the landscapes and resources of the Pacific Northwest, and built relationships with people from its wide interstices. The BPA worked to get widespread participation combined with objective data to develop a clear-eyed vision of who and what the region contained, and how it could be interconnected and built into a program that might help all people and places. It hoped to meet local needs while offering information, inexpensive electricity, the opportunity to network with other communities and agencies, and the tools to recruit new industry (Davis 1945b; Moment [1990?]). Once the first industrial survey was complete in spring 1940 (Bonneville Power Administration 1940), the BPA began to use its surveys for industrial recruitment. Information from the first survey helped locate plants later that year in Longview, Washington, and Troutdale, Oregon (Davis 1945b; Moment [1990?]).

As time went on, the BPA worked hard to spread out newly recruited industrial plants, so various parts of the region could benefit (Moment [1990?]; Davis 1945b, 1944; McKinley 1952). By the end of the Second World War, industrial plants which directly tapped BPA power dotted much of western Oregon and Washington, several locations in eastern Washington, and another few in western Montana (Lee, Klemka, and Marts 1980; Davis 1944) (figure 4.3). BPA was even willing to antagonize its industrial recruits to achieve this purpose. When Alcoa applied to build a single huge plant, BPA divided the proposed plant into three locations and three companies. This was not a simple feat. Alcoa held a virtual monopoly in the American aluminum industry. BPA essentially had to help jump-start Alcoa's competition. Litigation lasted for several years but BPA prevailed (Moment [1990?]; McKinley 1952 also emphasizes the significance of this effort).

With the industrial surveys and its industrial recruitment program, BPA found its niche as a comprehensive, resourceful, and resource-rich “regional Chamber of

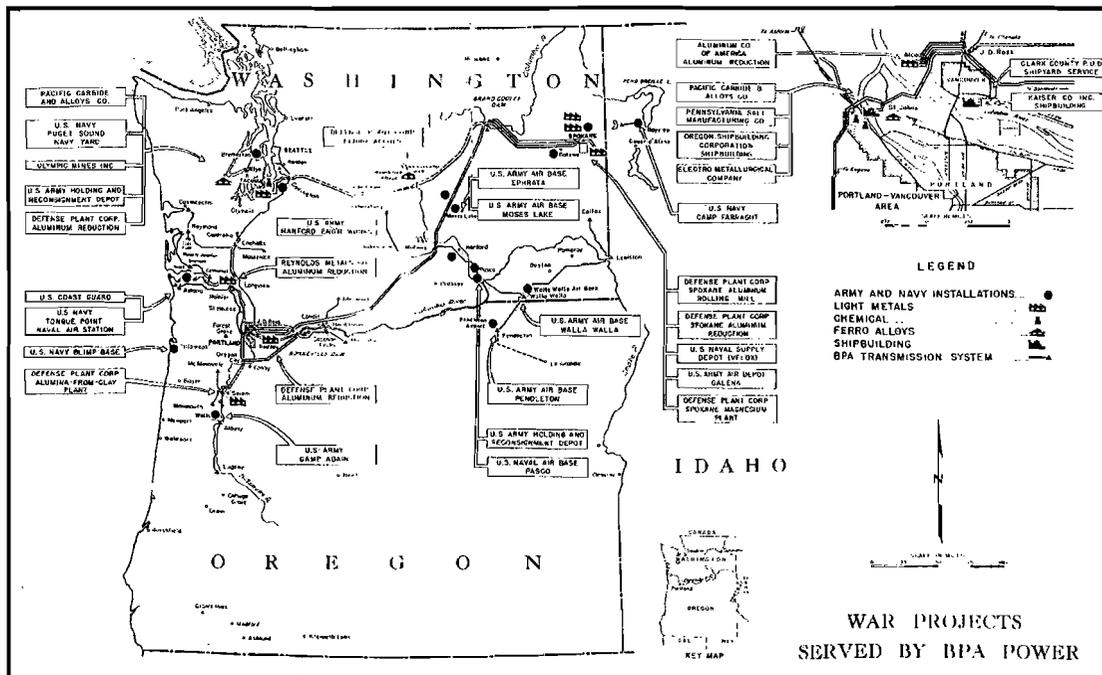


Figure 4.3. War projects served by BPA power. Note their distribution throughout much of the three-and-a-half-state Columbia River's Pacific Northwest. *Source:* Davis 1944.

Commerce” (Ogden 1949).¹⁹ Its employees built relationships with business and civic leaders throughout the wide region, and helped them to feel a part of the BPA’s program, and to become convinced they could benefit from it. BPA began to win for itself much improved political support. All these efforts remained deeply embedded in a much wider notion and practice of inclusive regional participation, and well-thought-out development which could disperse industry and improve people’s lives across social and economic sectors and throughout the regional territory.

Toward a Full Three-and-a-Half-State, Regionalist Pacific Northwest

In addition to the industrial surveys, there were two other main ways Raver’s BPA immediately began to head toward and achieve the PNWRPC’s vision of a Columbia River-centered Pacific Northwest.

19. I do not know who coined the phrase “regional Chamber of Commerce” but it is widely used as a description for BPA’s role during its early years. Ogden’s dissertation is the earliest work in which I have noted this phrase in print.

A three-and-a-half-state territory

First, the BPA built itself toward the full three-and-a-half-state territory envisioned by the PNWRPC. It continued to expand the transmission grid and power sales; it won geographically expanded legal authority; and it set up a regional administrative organization, most notably a series of satellite offices.

The regional power grid was already planned by Carey during the Ross administration; construction began the day before Ross died in March 1939. The pace of construction was unprecedented. The central grid was completed by the time Grand Coulee Dam came on line in 1941. By then, BPA was offering contracts for power throughout much of Oregon and Washington, and into northern Idaho as well (BPA 1980).

In 1940, BPA's authorization began to catch up to its geographical ambitions. The regional grid had been planned despite the fact that the agency's authorization did not make it an explicitly regional agency. But in a 1940 executive order BPA was given responsibility for Grand Coulee Dam's power (Davis 1945b).²⁰ This was the legal step which clearly expanded the agency beyond the local area of Bonneville Dam, making it undeniably "regional" (Tollefson 1987).

BPA also developed political relationships and set up administrative infrastructure to manage its expanding geographical area. In addition to representatives of the PNWRPC and the new Northwest Regional Council, it cultivated working relationships with representatives from all four states. The BPA also set up district offices as its grid expanded – in Eugene ("Southwestern" office) in 1939, Yakima ("Mid-Columbia") in 1940, and in Seattle ("Puget Sound") and Spokane ("Eastern") in 1941. Portland also had an area office for the "Lower Columbia" district (Davis 1945b).

Broader regional planning to achieve wide social and environmental goals

The second way that Raver's BPA began to put the PNWRPC's regional conception into practice was to try to undertake, support or consider other regional

20. The committee that helped draft the executive order was a successor to the one which had drafted the Bonneville Power Act and had many of the same people – plus Dr. Paul Raver.

studies and educational efforts related to broad regional planning. The BPA was not interested in focusing narrowly on economic development, nor was it eager to ingratiate itself only with business elites. Through most of the Raver years, there was a broad sense of social and environmental mission – embodied most famously in the songs Woody Guthrie wrote about the Columbia River and its dams when he was hired by the BPA for a month in 1939 (Majdic and Matthews 1999).²¹

These weren't simply propaganda and starry-eyed visions; they also influenced BPA's policy and practice. In Raver's first year or two – to some extent even into the war and early postwar years – the BPA could do a lot in this direction, and keep its vision fairly broad. It was granted leeway to work – and appropriations – thanks to the political support won from its early industrial sales and its industrial surveys, as well as continuing enthusiasm for the New Deal, public power and a Columbia Valley Authority.

Thus, the BPA collaborated closely with and supported the PNWRPC and the Northwest Regional Council for a broad approach to regional resource development. BPA supported the PNWRPC in conducting a forestry study (PNWRPC 1938) and a labor relations study (Randall 1942); the PNWRPC and Northwest Regional Council supported BPA in conducting a four-state power forecast survey and a minerals resources study. In the minerals study, BPA inventoried mineral resources in or near the Pacific Northwest, and analyzed whether and how they might be processed within the region (McKinley 1952; Davis 1945b). In addition, BPA took the initiative in several areas. BPA employee Samuel Moment traveled to the TVA to learn about the TVA's comprehensive regional planning program; he came back looking for opportunities to support sustained-yield forestry and soil conservation (Moment [1990?]). He began an investigation into freight rates, and found that railroad rates supported the importation of manufactures to the Pacific Northwest rather than intra-regional trade; he began planning a possible new freight line across southern Idaho powered by BPA power (Moment [1990?]; McKinley 1952).

21. When I conducted an interview in 2004 with one of the few surviving members of the BPA staff from the agency's earliest years, I could still hear the inspiration in his voice. The same kind of sense of broad social and environmental mission comes through again and again, in writings, works and words of other BPA employees from that era and their associates (Moment [1990?]; see also quotes from Raver and others in BPA 1980; Tollefson 1987).

Nor had BPA forgotten or abandoned the vision of a clean, healthy natural environment that would be part of a collective regional endeavor, providing for people's well-being, and appreciated and protected in return. BPA's 1939 movie "Hydro!" shows the grandeur of the Columbia River (Kahn 1939). Samuel Moment in a 1990 memoir wrote several pages describing the amazing scenery through which he traveled, while doing the industrial surveys. His time working for BPA and living in the Pacific Northwest, he says, turned him into a conservationist (Moment [1990?]).²² Raver worked to support the conservation of the Columbia Gorge and signed a Memorandum of Agreement with the PNWRPC and the Northwest Regional Council committing to making sure other scenic areas in the basin were similarly protected (Davis 1945b).

Enhanced but Narrowed Regionalism

BPA would never completely sacrifice this broader vision – and indeed, would find it renewed in the 1980 Northwest Power Act (see Ch. 5). But even in the very earliest Raver years and months, even before the war began to redirect BPA resources in mid-1940, and well before the demise of the PNWRPC or even later, the final abandonment of efforts to pass a Columbia Valley Authority bill, BPA's approach to this broader vision was narrowing. Though the goals, images and ideals remained – and many of the research and organizational methods, as suggested by the industrial survey – the means largely narrowed to selling power and recruiting industry, in as many places as possible. The reasons were both political and legal. Politically, power sales helped the BPA survive an increasingly conservative Congress. Even more immediate – and ultimately critical for the agency's survival in Congress as well – power sales mollified critics within the region. Better still, many critics became enthusiasts. Once different areas and people began to see themselves as BPA beneficiaries – the small towns involved in the industrial surveys, the large cities which began to score new industries served by BPA power, and the customers who saw their electric rates drop – their attitudes toward the agency changed. BPA became a regional crowd pleaser.

22. Moment notes that Ivan Bloch was an avid fisherman – and was induced in part to work for the BPA by a lavish Chinook salmon dinner offered him by J.D. Ross (Moment [1990?]).

Also, the truth was that New Deal regionalism had rarely been interested in mounting a serious challenge to the political-economic structures and forces that drive economic and social geographies.²³ Certainly that had not been a part of the approach of the PNWRPC's Marshall Dana, or even Bessey and McKinley – though McKinley, clearly, understood that without such a challenge only so much could be achieved (see chapter introductory quote). Paul Raver's BPA and the agency's supporters spent considerable effort fighting one major political battle against dominant economic players: the battle for public power (Ogden 1949 documents many of these battles particularly well). This consumed their attentions, energies, and political capital. In other realms, they had to make friends and compromises.²⁴ Putting practically any of the other ideas into practice would have harmed some places and people to benefit others, and drawn far more acrimony toward the agency. Raver, far more than Ross, was willing to learn this lesson, and to abandon such efforts. Thus, for example, when some criticized the BPA for favoring certain locations in its industrial recruitment program – something which would have been necessary to create any kind of planned economic geography of the region, helping to build intra-regional trade or improved regional autonomy – BPA roundly denied such accusations. It was collecting and providing information from all parts of the region; industries themselves chose where to locate (Davis 1945b). While it was not entirely true that BPA was allowing industries free choice of location – as evidenced by BPA's forced breakup of the proposed huge Alcoa plant – BPA's goal had become simply distribution of industry, not any kind of planned economic geography.²⁵

23. Weaver (1984) argues this is a much broader and longer failure of most regionalist ideas and efforts. Tullos (1990) provides a particularly compelling case of the failures of Howard Odum's regionalist work in the South to change basic social stratification and exploitation.

24. A similar compromise was made in the Tennessee Valley. Director Arthur Morgan was the strongest supporter of broad regional planning, but he was willing to compromise with private power companies and form a joint power pool. Co-director David Lilienthal favored an all-out battle to take over private power systems, but was less interested in broader regional planning. By 1938, the two were locked in an intractable battle, and FDR fired Arthur Morgan. Lilienthal won the day and waged a largely successful – if hugely contentious – battle for public power in the Tennessee Valley (McCraw 1971). But the price was that Lilienthal had to let the other remaining director, Harcourt Morgan, run the agricultural program. Harcourt Morgan favored continuing control by local elites – county officials and agricultural extension offices. They obstructed any effort to change the fundamental social structures of agriculture. Black farmers, for example, were given little say or opportunity in the program (Grant 1978; Selznick 1953).

25. Even by a New Deal agency committed to public power, it seems private industry was somehow assumed to be an objective – and benign – chooser of location.

Legally, the problem was BPA's limited authority. BPA counsel advised Raver very early on that BPA did not have the statutory authority for broad regional planning. Research and planning could be conducted only as long as it related to BPA's statutory authorities – transmitting and marketing electric power. The BPA under Raver stretched this as far as it could go – but realized there were limits.²⁶ These legal limits were of course products of the earlier political battle over the Bonneville Project Act, supposedly only temporarily resolved. The BPA faced precisely the same political pressures as the ongoing CVA efforts, and was given – and found – only a narrow way through .

For many modern writers, the most galling of BPA's failures was its abandonment during this time of the river's ecosystem and its wild salmon. At the same time the BPA was promoting itself with images of a wild-flowing river and leaping salmon in its 1939 movie *Hydro!* the Grand Coulee Dam was rising up in the middle of Washington State. Completed in 1941, Grand Coulee fundamentally transformed the mainstem Columbia River in a way nothing else had done: it created a huge reservoir, and blocked the upriver-downriver migration of salmon and other species. Gradually people realized too that just as fundamental a change came with the alteration wrought in the river's annual flows, for the dam was built as a storage dam which could even out the spring peaks and fall lows. Much later still was the realization that the dam changed the flow of sediment, with long-lasting repercussions for the river below. This was only the beginning of the ecological changes wrought by the dams that would soon dot the entire river system, built to feed the region's enthusiasm for selling power.

It was not that salmon or the Columbia River's natural beauty were abandoned or seen as unimportant. True, BPA employees, as well as others who promoted regional development,²⁷ put too much hope in technological solutions such as hatcheries (Taylor 1999; Lichatowich 1999), and they saw specific aspects of the environment – even its

26. BPA, Washington State legislators, and other supporters pushed hard in 1941-42 for a Columbia River Power Administration (Ogden 1949). Ivan Bloch argued that any legislation should include clear support for regional planning, a definite relationship to other regional planning agencies, and authority to conduct research related to "factors affecting the generation, transmission, and distribution and use of electricity" (Davis 1945b: III-76). This effort failed, though (Ogden 1949). Eventually, further limits would be imposed in the late 1940s when Congress disposed of BPA's appropriations for research altogether (McKinley 1952; Moment [1990?]).

27. Notably, Roy Bessey is villainized in Karl Brooks' book about the effort to build Hells Canyon Dam as the leader of the effort to accept Snake River salmon extinction as the price of full Columbia River development.

prodigious wild salmon – as less important than power. But what needs to be understood is that the aim continued to be wide regional good, and this incorporated the notion of a healthy natural environment. Hydropower was understood as inherently good for the environment – providing clean energy which could disperse the concentrations of people, industry and coal pollution which had burdened eastern cities.

Moreover, power was the only resource that seemed to offer such wide benefits to society and the environment alike, the only resource which could be spread evenly throughout the region. Inexpensive electric power was also the only resource that could hold the fractious parts of the not-so-homogeneous Pacific Northwest together. And it was the resource which the BPA could work with. With the termination of the PNWRPC in 1943, and the end of the hopes for a CVA in about 1950, the BPA could internalize only so much.²⁸ Nor were the death of the PNWRPC and the CVA, and the narrowing of the BPA, unrelated. The BPA's great success at finding regional commonality rested on its promotion of the Pacific Northwest as a location for new industry, BPA power as an unrivaled electric power resource, and its ability to recruit industry to locations throughout much of the Pacific Northwest. For all these reasons, no other Columbia River resource besides power became truly regional.

Between 1939 and 1941, then, the Columbia River-centered Pacific Northwest was more fully institutionalized into BPA practice. Regionalism was enhanced and strengthened, but at the same time sharply narrowed. The Columbia River and the Pacific Northwest were linked in a vision of a shared better future, but the links between them increasingly were electric power, industry, and the BPA itself.

Such was the price of BPA's institutional survival.

28. Raver endorsed a Columbia Valley Authority that would have as an accompaniment a multi-state regional planning council; and when the PNWRPC was terminated in 1943, he would take Bessey on as an advisor – and keep him on in an advisory capacity for many more years after that – but there was only so much BPA could do. And Bessey, too, seemed to accept that inexpensive power was the region's most important and most regional resource (Brooks 2006).

A NATION AT WAR CONNECTS A REGION, 1941-45

What makes a region, and what connects a region to its river? In the Pacific Northwest and the Columbia River, it turns out the forces of connection come from without as much as from within. The federal government and national-scale politics have been central at every step.²⁹ But the constitution of the regional by the national in the Pacific Northwest was never more clear than in World War II.³⁰ It was national mobilization for international war that enabled the realization of full regional coordination in the Pacific Northwest, as well as complete interconnection between the Pacific Northwest and the Columbia River

National war built regional coordination and interconnection between region and river, in very particular ways, however. The war, wrote BPA's official chronicler of the war years Lillian Davis, had "one preponderant result" for the BPA. It "telescoped more than ten years of normal growth into a brief five years" (Davis 1944, I-1). World War II also magnified most the emphases already developing in the very early Raver administration from regionalist initiative and political strategy, and added a few new emphases. The drive to sell power and the mission to recruit industry became all-consuming. The Columbia River continued its transformation from a complex river of many lands and many resources into an engine of electric power. Where once the river had been seen as a connecting resource between places, tapped in many different ways, now more than anything it was a common resource of a single kind, its power spread across the region like butter. The Pacific Northwest became unified far more than the PNWRPC had ever dreamed, and indelibly tied to the Columbia River system, but the connections were transmission lines, a shared bounty of cheap federal hydropower, and a federal agency which acted as regional Chamber of Commerce in winning resources

29. This fits of course with the maxim put forward by many historians of the American West that the federal government – despite often being vilified and portrayed as outsider – has been a fundamental shaper and provider (Limerick 1987 makes this argument particularly clearly). My argument is slightly different, or at least more specific: I argue that the federal government not only shaped the Pacific Northwest but united it into a region.

30. World War II is seen as a time when the West as whole as well was particularly transformed. See (cite from D Pope).

offered by the national war mobilization. Other aspects of the BPA program, other visions for the Pacific Northwest and the Columbia River, were largely left to languish. The goals of wide social benefit, high quality of life based in part on a bountiful environment, and a regionally shared better future were not forgotten. But they were interpreted through the lens of power sales, industrial production, and regional boosterism on a national stage.

There were four main ways that the BPA, the Pacific Northwest and the Columbia River became more interconnected, and more fully regional, during World War II.

The Columbia River's Northwest Lures the War

First, the war advanced and magnified BPA's role as regional booster and provider. In September 1939, as Raver was preparing to take his new job as Bonneville administrator, President Roosevelt declared a 'limited national emergency' based on growing war hostilities. In spring 1940, a reconstituted National Power Policy Committee met, with the BPA Administrator appointed as a new member. It was in Raver's first meeting with the National Power Policy Committee that it became clear that BPA could and should reorient its industrial recruitment program to industrial needs for the looming US entry into the war. By July 1940 BPA had produced a report, *Industry Important to National Defense Feasible of Establishment in the Pacific Northwest*, which compiled its existing regional data into a set of recommendations aimed particularly at the National Defense Advisory Committee. The report recommended that many war industries might be established or expanded in the Pacific Northwest, including manufacture of ships, explosives, aircraft, and war chemicals (McKinley 1952; Davis 1944).

Over the next several years, Administrator Raver and others regularly called upon Congress, the War Production Board, and major industrial leaders to make the case for the Pacific Northwest as the best destination for new industrial plants and other war installations. Raver expanded the agency's tiny Washington D.C. office. The attitude was clearly that expansion was good; that if power supplies were increased, customers would come; and that the goal was to recruit as many industrial plants as possible. BPA's efforts paid off. BPA was hugely successful at locating defense industries and other war

installations. By 1944, an incredible ninety-eight percent of BPA's power commitments were for war purposes – ninety-three percent for war industries and five percent for Army and Navy establishments. The vast majority of this power went to five aluminum plants, which together produced one-third of the country's aluminum (Davis 1944). A large secret load turned out to be the Hanford Nuclear reservation, which produced the fuel for the bomb that dropped on Nagasaki (BPA 1980). War installations were located from Albany, Oregon in the south to Bremerton, Washington in the North, from Astoria, Oregon in the west to Coeur D'Alene, Idaho in the east (Davis 1944) (see Figure 4.2).

The success of this program proved BPA's worth to the nation. BPA's long-distance regional grid was suddenly a national resource, providing the high-voltage transmission system that could take power wherever needed all over the Pacific Northwest – even to the often remote areas deemed less vulnerable to attack.

But at the same time BPA's war recruitment program tapped national resources to prove the agency's national worth, they also proved the BPA's worth to the region; and tied BPA, region and river more firmly together. There was a solidifying sense of regional entitlement to industry and national resources, based on the Pacific Northwest's claim to cheap Columbia River power. The region's importance became less about its own interconnections, and more about successful competition with other regions on the national stage.³¹

Electric Interconnections

The second way the Pacific Northwest, the BPA and the Columbia River became more interconnected because of the war was that increasing power demand led to river-system wide interconnected development, with river management coordinated by the BPA.

The volume of power that the new war loads required was enormous, exceeding by significant margins even the prodigious output planned to be generated initially at Bonneville and Grand Coulee Dams. It required the rapid installation of additional

31. There was considerable concern, for example, when some in Washington D.C. seemed to suggest the Tennessee Valley might be a better location for a major block of industries, or when one recruited industry – aluminum processing – was located in California rather than the Pacific Northwest (Davis 1944).

generators at both Bonneville and Grand Coulee and a break-neck pace of transmission construction (Davis 1944; BPA 1980; McKinley 1952). Even so, power supply could not easily keep up with demand. This led to a push to build more dams as soon as possible. Although the War Production Board declined to fund all the additions that BPA requested, by the end of the war, there were new dams authorized on the mainstem Columbia, the Snake, and the Flathead Rivers; and the power from these as well as several Army Corps dams newly constructed or under construction on the Willamette system had been designated to be transmitted and marketed by the BPA system.

This was not full basin-wide development and coordination yet, but it was coming close. BPA had clearly become a Columbia River agency, even if its name had not been changed. Efforts to pass legislation creating a Columbia River Power Agency failed in 1941-2, but piecemeal dam authorization and administrative expansion were making up much of the difference.³²

Upriver Storage to Participation of Upriver States

The third way that national war mobilization advanced regional coordination and ties between the three-and-a-half-state Pacific Northwest and the Columbia River was through a drive for upstream storage. BPA's desire for upriver storage prompted talks with and participation from upstream states, bringing especially western Montana, but also Idaho and even Wyoming, into representative participation in Columbia River and Pacific Northwest planning.

The problem was that building new power dams was not enough. Too much water flowed down the Columbia River at one time of the year, in the spring and early summer, when not all of it could be used. Grand Coulee provided storage that could reserve some of the spring "freshet" for later in the year, but even the largest dam on the planet was no match for the Columbia's volume. Thus the BPA began to search for sites farther upriver where large storage dams could be built. In 1943, the BPA and the Army Corps of

32. Two important authorities were *not* provided for in this piecemeal and administrative expansion, that would have been provided by the 1941-2 legislation: the authority to purchase private power systems, and either the authority to conduct, or the responsibility to coordinate with, regional planning. Both issues would return as major legislative initiatives in the late 1970s, and would finally be provided in some form by the 1980 Northwest Power Act. See chapter 6.

Engineers advanced a proposal to build a dam that would raise Flathead Lake in Montana. It was the easiest and cheapest site to build a dam that could store large volumes of upriver flows. The problem was that people lived, worked and played along the shore of Flathead Lake, and raising the level of the lake would mean evacuating residences and turning a much-loved area into a reservoir with changing water levels, seasonally uncovering dead vegetation and mud. Opposition was fierce, and the BPA and the Corps quickly conceded (Davis 1944; McKinley 1952; BPA 1980; Ogden 1949).

The outcomes were a switch to a dam at Hungry Horse on the Flathead River, and the organization of a five-state governors' association – including the governor of Wyoming as well as Idaho and Montana – and a joint federal-state effort to plan upriver development. By late 1943, the five governors had endorsed a specific set of projects for future river developments, and the BPA had used the governors' recommendations to develop its own recommendations to Congress. One major result was an oversize report, *Pacific Northwest Opportunities* (BPA 1944), with maps of proposed dams and a description of the economic opportunities they might bring.³³

Thus did the upriver states and their publics finally become real players in BPA practice – and with this, in planning and managing the Columbia River system (Davis 1944; Ogden 1949; McKinley 1952).³⁴

The inclusion of the upriver states within the BPA region was reinforced when the Department of Interior endorsed the idea that northern Idaho and western Montana should be considered a part of BPA's marketing area (Davis 1944).

33. The report, which looks remarkably like works produced by the PNWRPC and the Northwest Regional Council, was published the year after the PNWRPC was terminated in 1943. It cites Roy Bessey as the organizing thinker for the report (BPA 1944). Raver had appointed Bessey to be the Secretary of a new Executive Committee to advise the BPA in 1943 (BPA 1980).

34. This five-state effort eventually led to a seven-state effort during much of the 1950s and 1960s to form a full river-wide interstate compact. This issues among this larger group ultimately proved to be too contentious to be resolved. In the end, it would be the four states of the PWNRPC's regional conception that were able to form a compact in the 1980 Northwest Power Act (see chapter 6) – although southern Idaho managed both to keep BPA power out for the most part, and to keep management of the upper Snake independent from that of the lower Snake and Columbia (Volkman 1997). Thus the region finally became two states and two half-states – plus, in many ways, a province (again, see chapter 6).

Power for All

Fourth, national need forced partial peace between private and public power, transcending to at least some extent one of the basic fractures of regional politics and territory.

As the war buildup began, the BPA sold power not only to large industrial customers, but increasingly, to private utilities as well. Paradoxically, this led to greater regional inclusion at the same time it violated a different progressive vision for the BPA: the vision of the BPA serving an area in which all electric utilities were public or cooperative, owned and run by “the people.” But the recurring, bruising fights with private utilities first over the creation of PUDs and rural electric cooperatives, and then over these new utilities’ efforts to acquire power or distribution systems, were sobering. Already by the early 1940s it was becoming all too clear that private utilities still had too much political power, too much legal recourse, and too many economic resources, to be dispatched easily. The “power trust” had lost too much in the Tennessee Valley, and it turned sharpened political and legal tools to hold on to their territories in the Pacific Northwest. With a changing attitude in Congress toward the New Deal, and with criticisms of BPA mounting, the large privates were largely holding the allegiance of major jurisdictions they served – the cities of Portland and Spokane, and the states of Oregon and Idaho – against public power (Ogden 1949).

Wartime needs prompted both sides to set aside their bloody battles, and work together. For the BPA, there were three major issues on which it compromised: resale rates, firm contracts, and a power pool. At first, BPA kept its sales contracts with private utilities under tight restrictions: short duration contracts with strict resale rate provisions. The latter were contract rules which required BPA customers to offer its retail power for sale below certain rates. The idea of resale rates was that they ensured that the benefits of federal investment in power would reach the broad public. The idea of short-duration contracts was that power needed for public utilities might be reclaimed by the BPA when it was needed. But facing stiff resistance on the resale rate issue, and in the name of

power needed for war, the BPA soon began to compromise, offering firm contracts for longer terms without resale rate conditions (Davis 1945b).³⁵

The BPA and public utilities also refused at first to form a power pool with the private utilities – this would enable the privates to profit from cheap federal Columbia River power.³⁶ But as power demand surged, and it became clear that new generation would not keep up, all power providers in the Pacific Northwest were forced to find alternatives. A power pool was a key alternative to new generation. It joined different electric power systems into one large shared system of power. In the environmentally diverse Pacific Northwest, coastal dams like those of Seattle City Light, mainstem dams like those of the BPA, and inland tributary dams like those of Idaho Power, all had different generation peaks based on different rivers' flows. Various customers also had different times of peak demand. By sharing their power, BPA and the many utilities of the Pacific Northwest could help each other shore up their ability to meet their loads. At first the publics – primarily BPA, Seattle and Tacoma – formed one power pool, while private utilities formed their own separate pools in different parts of the region. But by late 1941 BPA and the major utilities, public and private alike, were discussing how to organize a power pool for the war. In 1942 the War Production Board mandated a region-wide power pool. The only recently completed regional BPA grid was able to provide the central interconnections that linked systems as far apart as Seattle and Utah. Thus it was that broad regional interconnection of all Pacific Northwest power systems, with BPA at the core, was forged by war (Davis 1944; BPA 1980; McKinley 1952).

By the end of the war the BPA was at the core of a fully integrated regional power pool which stretched throughout the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest and even beyond, but there was no longer talk of a regional public power empire. Though the BPA

35. Part of the argument for relaxing resale rate provisions was that private utility rates were normally regulated by the states, not the federal government. Resale rate provisions were also a major source of conflict between BPA and its larger public customers like Seattle City Light and Tacoma Power. These utilities, long used to being the leaders in public power in the Pacific Northwest, resented being told how to set rates. Ironically, BPA tried to control their resale rates longer than it did those of the privates (Davis 1945b).

36. Power pooling had been a central battle in the Tennessee Valley, one that drove directors Arthur Morgan and David Lillenthal apart. Arthur Morgan had supported a pool with privates; Lillenthal and others had seen this almost as betrayal and had successfully fought to take over the private systems instead, or to force them to compete with TVA's rates (McCraw 1971). There was a sense, then, that pooling with private utilities, like relinquishing the power to command resale rates, was capitulating to "the power trust."

averred that resale rates and short-term contracts could be reinstated after the war (Davis 1944), this proved politically impossible. BPA had won acceptance, even some support, from business and political leaders in cities like Portland and Spokane, and in the states of Oregon, Idaho and Montana; it needed to keep these. And the success of the power pool meant that discussions about taking over private utility systems were basically over. Wartime concessions became permanent wins for private utilities over the hopes of public power hardliners (McKinley 1952).

The irony is that this war-driven compromise of principles meant that BPA came to provide for a much more inclusive group of Pacific Northwest places and customers. The private utilities did not become equals with the “preference” customers, the public utilities, nor did the areas served by private utilities become equally “regional,” but they were now clearly part of the regional system. The cities of Portland and Spokane, the states of Oregon and Idaho, and other places and jurisdictions closely aligned with private power interests were knit into the BPA’s region, the Columbia River’s Pacific Northwest.

CONCLUSION

In the years between the launch of the BPA in late 1937, the Columbia River’s Pacific Northwest was forever changed. During the war especially, a huge number of people moved to the region, especially to the industrial production centers in the Portland, Puget Sound and Spokane areas. Industry multiplied. Most rural areas received electricity. Though industry was still not diverse and the regional economy remained dependent on outside markets and financial resources, the region as a whole had become far more prosperous and mature (Schwantes 1996; BPA 1980; Davis 1944).

But there was another change too: the Columbia River’s Pacific Northwest had become a region, with deeply interconnected infrastructure, and shared regional economic advantage, inexpensive electric power. The construction agency that built that infrastructure was also the wholesale provider of most electric power. It was not often visible, but behind the scenes, it was BPA transmission lines, BPA policies, and continued BPA promotion of the Pacific Northwest that joined the three and a half states

of Washington, Oregon, Idaho and western Montana into a united area, tying them too to their common source, the Columbia River.

Although the region became more united, though, and its identity and prosperity were now undeniably centered around the Columbia River, BPA's and the region's commitment to regionalism faltered. The goal of regional coordination had narrowed to widely shared regional economic growth. The means were expanding power sales and continued efforts to distribute industry across the region. In this plan, regional well-being would be achieved through still more Columbia River dams, and continued promotion of the Pacific Northwest as a location for industry based on its unmatched cheap electric power. When a more conservative Congress slashed the BPA's appropriations, the main remnant of the old regionalist vision that was left was of more dams, more power, more economic growth.

And yet the ideals of broad social well-being, a geographical spreading out of industry and economic opportunity, and the conservation of resources had not disappeared entirely. Indeed, through the war years and the first several years after, the BPA tried to fulfill a "double-barreled mission" of meeting war needs while planning for broad regional benefit that could last well after the war (McKinley 1952). After the PNWRPC was terminated in 1943, Bessey was brought in as a BPA advisor, and BPA internalized regional planning as much as it could for the next several years. Bessey (1963) suggests that 1943-6 marked the height of BPA's own regional planning. In the late 1940s, after Congress ended appropriations for BPA's market research program, which had housed its regional planning effort, the BPA had an even harder time trying to pursue broad social and environmental goals. But it had built enough of a sense of region, and enough of a mission of widely spread prosperity, enough of a vision of environmental bounty, that many of its employees, political allies and customers still pursued these ideas. And when they did not, these ideals and visions were fodder for challenge. Invoking the ideals of broad participation, wide social benefit, and environmental protection would prove to be an essential strategy for those in the region who aimed to break in to gain a share of the Columbia River's benefits over the ensuing decades.

CHAPTER V

EVOLUTION:

CHALLENGE AND RESPONSE, 1945-1980

INTRODUCTION

Between the end of the Second World War and 1980, the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest continued and grew, but remained structured around the BPA and inexpensive Columbia River power. Most of the core infrastructure and policies had been laid out already in the agency's first eight years, and many of the same visions guided the agency and still found considerable support through much of the region. But as the New Deal faded into history, new challenges and challengers arose. Sometimes these were challengers that were structured into uneven roles in the BPA system, such as private power companies; other times they were newly empowered forces and ideas like Native American tribes and environmental sensibilities; still other times they were interests and jurisdictions that were understood to be fundamental parts of the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest, like states and public utilities, but which had grown unhappy with BPA's lone management of resources they saw as their own. These challengers' ability to force change on the BPA and its region varied with political tides and changing law, but challengers had particular leverage when the BPA sought to expand its geography or authority, and needed the support of its regional congressional delegation.

This chapter offers only a short interlude, summarizing and offering a brief analysis of the changes in the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest between the end of World War II and the passage of the Northwest Power Act in 1980. It is built largely from a few seminal secondary sources (especially Lee, Klemka, and Marts 1980; BPA 1980), though specific sections rely on other works (mainly Brooks 2006; Pope 2008). A

short section also draws from an article I wrote on the Columbia River Treaty (Vogel 2008b) – itself drawn from a significant literature on the treaty and its series of associated agreements (Krutilla 1967; Swainson 1979; Dean and Schultz 1989; Logie 1993; Bankes 1996; Shurts 2005) plus several informal conversations with policy-makers and interest group representatives about the history of the treaty and subsequent policy developments.

Over time, the uneven trend has been that the BPA and the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest have expanded to serve wider interests, moving closer to the New Deal regionalist ideal. The chapter finishes by summarizing the politics and legislative changes built into the 1980 Pacific Northwest Electric Power Planning and Conservation Act (Northwest Power Act). This act remade both the BPA and the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest in fundamental ways, by giving the BPA greater authority but making it accountable to states, tribes, energy conservation goals, and fish and wildlife. It is against the backdrop of the renewed regionalist hopes after the passage of the Northwest Power Act that we can best understand the hopes and disappointments of people thinking and writing about regionalism in the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest today (see Chapter VI).

REGIONAL STRUCTURE, GEOGRAPHY AND TRANSFORMATION AFTER 1945

Since the end of World War II, the Columbia River has continued to be seen and treated as a resource and unifying feature shared by a Pacific Northwest region that consists of Washington, Oregon, Idaho and western Montana. The geographical boundaries of the area have not been absolute, nor was regional-ness ever made even: Washington has continued to be the most “regional” of the four states; southern Idaho often tries to recuse itself – and in many way has succeeded – from the region entirely; British Columbia has to a considerable extent become a part of the region; and sometimes the corners of Wyoming, Utah and Nevada that lie within the Columbia Basin have been included. Just as the geography has shifted and is uneven, the precise content and character have been and are as well.

What has been constant throughout many changes and much unevenness is that the primary bond that makes this Pacific Northwest into a “region” and that binds it to the Columbia River, is federal Columbia River hydropower, designated as a regional resource by the laws and policies that guide the BPA. Of all the river’s benefits and connections, only power was ever made truly regional. This is the legacy of the PNWRPC’s call for a regional agency that would administer only power, combined with the early abandonment of regionally participatory planning, and the narrow institutionalization of the PNWRPC’s vision into the BPA.¹ Power unifies precisely because the BPA offered and offers a regional grid and regionally uniform rates – and because the bounty is great enough it *could* be spread like butter around the region and still provide economic benefit. No other resource could be so readily shared, or was so shared – not fish, not irrigation, not recreational opportunities, not navigation, not even flood control.

To Bonneville and Grand Coulee Dams were added the power eventually of 29 other dams, creating an extensive and integrated regional federal power system, called the Federal Columbia River Power System, all transmitted and marketed by the BPA (BPA, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and Bureau of Reclamation 2001b, 2001a). Most of these had been authorized by the end of the war, the rest by the end of the Truman administration in 1953. Once political support for new federal dams dried up, though, there were a host of major dams built on the mainstem river and large tributaries by private and non-federal public utilities, including many on the Canadian portion of the basin.

These dams have powered a continued growth in industry and population in the three-and-a-half-state Pacific Northwest. Although the long-dominant timber industry declined, and agriculture was not for much longer an occupation for small yeoman farmers, the Pacific Northwest has done quite well for itself economically. Like the rest of the country, and especially the West, it is largely an urban region now, and the cities of

1. It is worth remembering though that a much broader political and economic context forced this narrowing of focus in each of these steps. No other resource promised the kind of economic bounty that could withstand the many centrifugal forces driving different parts of a river basin, different states and cities and towns in a “region,” apart. Significantly, the same narrowing happened at the TVA, just slightly more gradually (Hargrove 1994; Creese 1990; Chandler 1984; Hargrove and Conkin 1983).

Seattle, Portland and Spokane, the Tri-Cities of Washington located near the Hanford nuclear plant, even Boise and several smaller cities in Idaho and western Montana, have grown.² Not only aluminum companies came to benefit from cheap hydropower; other industries, including high-tech companies like Intel and Microsoft, have benefited from low power rates.

While hydropower dams fueled a growing regional economy and thriving regional cities, the physical impact on the river was profound. By the mid-1970s few stretches ran freely any more; the once wild river system became a system of deep, slow lakes. The flow of water in the Columbia River, the Snake, and most other major tributaries became controlled in large part by upriver storage dams, and changed from an annual cycle with pronounced seasonal peaks, to one that was much more even year-round, and now generally peaks in the seasons when power demand is highest (Columbia River Treaty Entities 2004). While seasonal peaks dampened, daily flow fluctuations grew pronounced, reflecting changing power demand and irrigation withdrawals between day and night. These hydrological changes impacted river ecology and ecosystems negatively. Deep waters drowned riverine habitat. Lost seasonal and annual dynamism has reduced the creation and rejuvenation of what fluvial habitat remains. Daily fluctuations strand baby fish and other organisms that need consistent water levels during incubating or rearing. And of course, salmon, the flagship animals of the river, were blocked by the tallest of the dams from reaching about half of the area in the Columbia Basin that they once reached. Even in the rest of the basin, salmon numbers plummeted, propped up only in part by the scores of hatcheries dotting the basin. Salmon are both indicator and keystone species,³ and the loss of salmon speaks for much wider ecological losses as well – some only recently, or perhaps not yet, understood. It turns out, for example, that salmon have for millennia brought large volumes of ocean nutrients to remote places like rocky central Idaho. The rich forests that characterize that area today are beginning to show the troubles of a great loss of nutrients.

2. Spokane has grown, but is less dominant as a regional center than it was in the 1930s and 1940s.

3. An indicator species is one which relies on many other aspects of an ecosystem and whose decline suggests a broader decline in the species, structures and functions of the ecosystem. A keystone species is one which carries out some fundamental ecological function, or provides a fundamental resource for the rest of the ecosystem.

Despite these tangible losses, though, the BPA and federal Columbia River power have continued to be linked in image, ideology, and, to a considerable extent in practice, to the goals of a widely shared social benefit and a bountiful natural environment. Despite its ecological changes, the Columbia River is still at the heart of that vision and practice. This, too, is a legacy from the PNWRPC and the early BPA: a vision of a Pacific Northwest region joined by a beautiful and bountiful Columbia River which can bring the good life and a quality natural environment to all. Though not often achieved as the natural river's enthusiasts would wish, the vision retained considerable rhetorical and political power.

The truth is, though, that this vision and these ideals of wide social benefit and environmental productivity have also continued to be tied to a narrowly economic shared self-interest: a regional competitive advantage in attracting business because one primary economic input, electricity, is cheaper than anywhere else in the country. Ideals and self-interest were not in the beginning seen as contradictory (see Ch. 2); they were not seen as contradictory as the region was institutionalized during BPA's first eight years (Ch. 4); and, despite some wider public and media perception to the contrary, they have not usually been seen as contradictory in practice, either. Since the end of the Second World War, selling Columbia River power cheaply and widely across the region has been understood by most policy-makers as a fundamental benefit for people and the environment throughout the Pacific Northwest. Selling cheap Columbia River hydropower to attract business to the region and keep it there has been and is seen as part of what makes the Pacific Northwest all the socially and environmentally good things it claims to be: a healthful, community-minded, inclusive, and environmentally rich region, a good place to live. Environmental impacts have simply been seen as costs that particular places, interests, and components of the region have to bear in order to further the broadest, and most regional, of goods, electric power.

Self-interest and regional good not only are not contradictory; their link is fundamental to the relationship between region and river. Though it runs against the sensibility of present-day environmentalism, economic benefit is understood to bring social and environmental well-being; and because of this, there is a strong sense of

regionally shared moral legitimacy about this benefit. Based on this sense of moral legitimacy, the Pacific Northwest region has for decades claimed both right to and responsibility for the Columbia River's hydropower – and the river itself.

Amidst these ideals and ambitions of region, and amidst these claims on the Columbia River, there has been a very definite institutional and political structure that derives directly from the Bonneville Project Act and the institutional system the BPA set in place between 1937 and 1945. The central institution which makes Columbia River power regional, and in the process makes the river regional, is the BPA. The geography of BPA's transmission and marketing system mark the region.⁴ BPA's statutory authorities underlie its broader purposes and claims to moral legitimacy, while its administrative policies lay out how these purposes are applied in the physical and social landscape of the Pacific Northwest. The BPA receives its electric power from Army Corps of Engineers and Bureau of Reclamation dams, and the three agencies work collaboratively to administer the regional "Federal Columbia River Power System."⁵ BPA's primary business relationships are with its power customers, arrayed in tiers of "preference" since the passage of the Bonneville Project Act. Public and cooperative utilities are in the top tier; there are well over one hundred of these, some tiny, some large⁶, and they are arrayed across much of the region, but concentrated in its most northwest state, Washington. For decades beginning with Administrator Raver's industrial recruitment program, "direct service" industrial customers, or "Direct service industries," formed the second tier of preference, and private utilities third. In the last decade or so, though, many direct service industries have closed operations the Pacific

4. Richard White made this point briefly but clearly in *The Organic Machine* (1995).

5. The tensions between the Corps and the advocates of a regional power agency dissipated fairly early on, and the two agencies developed a strong collaboration. The BPA and the Bureau of Reclamation had a harder time coming to terms with one another, as Reclamation continued to want power proceeds to pay for irrigation (McKinley 1952). They now work collaboratively, but Reclamation has retained for itself somewhat separate turf even within the states of Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Montana – largely controlling, for example, the irrigation dams in the Yakima and Snake basins, as well as those in rivers outside the Columbia Basin – the Klamath and the upper Missouri.

6. The fragmentation of the energy system in the Pacific Northwest is unusual, and is a direct result of the BPA's existence in the region. Tiny utilities for many years relied entirely on the BPA to provide their power – and have relied on the BPA and broader regional public power consortiums to conduct research, lobby, negotiate, plan and invest for them. They have therefore been able to remain small and fragmented, never becoming vertically integrated like most electric utilities (Lee, Klemka, and Marts 1980).

Northwest, finding cheaper and more available electric power in other places – not in other places in the US, but rather in other countries where governments are still building new hydropower dams and recruiting new industrial customers: in the global South.

BPA's most important political relationships have from the beginning been with the members of the Pacific Northwest Congressional delegation.⁷ Though the BPA was conceived as and has remained a regional institution, it is still an agency of the U.S. federal government, dependent upon Congress and the presidential administration for both authorization and funds. This has made it vulnerable to national-scale political machinations, and to the envy of other states and other regions. The political process in Congress generally allows regional blocs to keep favorite subsidies and programs in a mutual regional back-scratching approach to political business. This makes possible BPA's survival – and the survival of Pacific Northwest low electric rates – but *only* if the Pacific Northwest delegation is unified. This requirement has made the BPA very responsive to concerns from the region's federal legislators. The Pacific Northwest media, the governors of the Pacific Northwest states, and major economic interest groups, because they have close influence on the region's federal legislators, have also had considerable ongoing influence on the BPA (BPA 1980; Funigiello 1973; Voeltz 1962).

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This basic institutional and political structure – and its associated ideas and practices of geography, environment, social and economic benefit – have not precluded change. They have merely directed and constrained it. Change has come both from within and without, or, more often, from a combination of the two.

The usual political fights *within* the region have been over how to divvy up the bounty of Columbia River power – especially between public and private utilities, but

7. For perhaps three decades the most important congressional contact and ally for the BPA, and the leader of the regional delegation in all matters having to do with Columbia River power, was Washington Senator Henry "Scoop" Jackson (Lee, Klemka, and Marts 1980).

direct service industries have also entered the fray.⁸ Often this has been a fight to claim a bigger share of the electric power marketed by the BPA, but there have also been efforts to claim a share of Columbia River power outside and apart from the BPA. There have also been struggles along the way to prioritize other aspects of the river, other river benefits, *besides* power – especially water for irrigation in upriver areas and states, and, in recent years, water and river habitat for salmon and other aquatic species. These intra-regional fights cannot generate unity in the Pacific Northwest congressional delegation, for they inherently set some parts of the region against others. Claimants in these struggles have had to rely on changes in and leverage from national-scale laws and politics, or on allies in Congress from outside the region.⁹ It has often been these intra-regional fights and their extra-regional politics which have gradually both expanded and limited the conception and practice of what the region and its claim on the Columbia River are about.

Two major shifts in the politics of natural resource governance that are national, even international, in scale, have helped to legitimize or strengthen interests that were relatively marginalized in the initial institutionalization of the Columbia River-centered Pacific Northwest. These are first, the rise of a neoliberal or market-oriented view that sees private industry and private property as *more* conducive to wide public opportunity and broad public interest than is government resource management or government ownership; and second, the rise in concern for natural ecosystems, species and processes. These shifts – backed as they are with considerable political and legal might from the national-scale federal government and national-scale lobbying groups – have at times threatened to destabilize or even dismantle the existing system of federal government-led, electric power-centered, regional management of the Columbia River. However, threats

8. The conflict with the direct service industries was not generally as acute, because their contracts allowed suspension of service during peak demand times (Lee, Klemka, and Marts 1980).

9. In recent years geographers have called this kind of political strategy of seeking support or leverage from jurisdictions that cover larger territories “jumping scale.” Others have argued that the strategy is really one of jumping jurisdictional *level*, for often the idea is to get to a more powerful political jurisdiction against a local or state government too beholden to limited interests. In the case of the Pacific Northwest, though, it really is a strategy of geographic scale, not level: policy and politics in relation to the Columbia River are organized primarily within the federal governmental level, whether regional or national. But the national-scale federal government (or the local-scale, federal government in Washington DC) provides different sorts of political opportunities.

to the regional Columbia River power system have also strongly motivated the regional congressional delegation to find common ground. In the end, such threats have tended to expand the content and participants, rather than topple the basic structure, of the Columbia River-centered Pacific Northwest.

Three major instances of challenge and change to the regional system illustrate how the dynamics of intra-regional conflict have often interacted with national and international-scale political and legal shifts. They also help explain the broad evolution of the Columbia River-centered Pacific Northwest region, and thus provide background to understand the region's geography and character, its relationship to the Columbia River, and the structure of political conflict over river management, today.

The first challenge and change to the river system began in the late 1940s, when private utilities and other private business interests in the Pacific Northwest were able to make use of a growing national-scale Cold War general backlash against much of the New Deal to begin to reverse their losses to public power and to the broader "public" mission of the BPA and its allies. In the immediate postwar period, public power and regionalist enthusiasts, including Paul Raver and BPA's still-idealistic employees, hoped to bring back a social and environmental mission, linked to a Columbia River-centered regional manifest destiny. BPA returned to its research on possible industrial location sites – expanding now into Idaho and Montana. It continued its fight against industrial monopoly, and proposed a new railroad line through southern Idaho that might force down freight rates. Its transmission lines and power reached into western Montana by 1950, helping several rural electric cooperatives to drop their customers' rates dramatically. And many in the region worked hard once again for a Columbia Valley Authority. The Truman administration lent its weight to this effort.

But the rising conservative tide in Congress held them back. In 1947 Congress ended funding for BPA's market research program – the core of its regionalist effort. A 1948 flood helped the cause of federal dams, but could neither bring back full regional planning nor enable the passage of a CVA. In the end, the legacies of the last great wave of Pacific Northwest New Deal regionalism were multiplied dams throughout much of the Columbia River system. Less tangible, though still potent, was the vision they left: a

Pacific Northwest region joined by a beautiful and bountiful Columbia River which could bring the good life and a quality natural environment to all.

But private power companies now tapped that vision and claimed it for themselves, and none with greater success – and greater change to the program that had been envisioned – than the Idaho Power Company. In the late 1940s, Idaho Power and Idaho irrigators hoped to forestall the development of a major federal dam on the middle Snake River which might bring BPA power into southern Idaho. By the early 1950s, they had the support of the Eisenhower administration, which had declared an end to administrative support for new federal dams. The proposed federal Hells Canyon High Dam became a national forum on private versus public enterprise, and in the end, in the middle Snake there arose three new Idaho Power dams instead of one great federal dam (Brooks 2006). Later, Idaho Power forestalled an effort to extend BPA lines into southern Idaho (Stacy 1991). Thus the BPA region was largely stopped in mid-Idaho, and the middle and upper Snake definitively – although not completely – separated in management from the lower Snake and the rest of the Columbia system.

But even Idaho Power's middle Snake dams were interconnected with the rest of the Pacific Northwest through a central regional grid largely owned and operated by BPA. Their success rested too on Idaho Power's ability to claim itself a *better* embodiment of the vision of broad public good and environmental stewardship – it even used the welfare of salmon to argue for its alternative design plan.¹⁰ And the offer of BPA lines and power still mattered in southern Idaho: it forced Idaho Power to lower rates and extend distribution lines into rural areas so as to forestall public clamor for Bonneville power. There was a tension, then: the middle and upper Snake Basin in southern Idaho were hydrologically¹¹, administratively, rhetorically, and politically both separated from, and made more a part of, the Columbia River-centered Pacific Northwest.

10. Its three lower dams offered the promise – unrealized, as it turned out – of salmon passage. And they would allow salmon access to Idaho's Salmon River (Brooks 2006).

11. The Snake River is still hydrologically a part of the Columbia Basin in the sense that it still drains into the Columbia River; there are no major out-of-basin transfers. But so much of the river's water is used for irrigation that the river actually runs completely dry before rejuvenating farther down river. Much of that water is ultimately returned to the river through groundwater flow but when it flows into the lower Snake is controlled to a considerable extent by Idaho Power's storage dam, Brownlee.

In the second major challenge and change, between the 1950s and the 1960s other private utilities and several independent-minded Public Utility Districts (PUDs¹²) leveraged first Eisenhower administration policies and then negotiations over an international treaty to win both greater participation in Columbia River management and a greater share of the river's benefits. When the Eisenhower administration refused to approve new federal dams, several PUDs built dams on the mid-Columbia, financing them with tax-exempt government bonds, but repaying the loans with long-term sales contracts to private utilities. This was the beginning of a new collaboration between private and public utilities in the Columbia River-centered Pacific Northwest, and of a differentiation between BPA and the PUDs (Lee, Klemka, and Marts 1980).

Soon, these PUDs and their private utility customers and allies clamored for more control over the flows out of the upriver Columbia River storage dams. They used negotiations over the 1964 Columbia River Treaty as an opportunity to leverage greater influence over river system management. They were able to influence their congressional representatives to oppose the treaty unless it met their demands; the senate would not ratify without unity in the Pacific Northwest delegation. The British Columbia government used a related strategy with the Canadian federal government. As a result, when the treaty came into effect, a long-term agreement among many utilities in the Pacific Northwest coordinated flows of the river and flows of the river's power to make sure that river system management worked optimally for everyone as a whole; and a British Columbian *provincial* corporation, BC Hydro, became comanager of the treaty dams with US federal (but regional) BPA and the Army Corps of Engineers. The region extended in a way to include British Columbia, and gained a much wider array of decision-making participants. Despite these expansions, though, the Columbia River-centered Pacific Northwest region also became more *internally* integrated and interconnected. River system management became much more unified, and decision making about the flows of both the river and its power became matters for wide regional participation. Thus the regional-ness of Columbia River management participation and benefits-sharing was strengthened even as its participants and even its geography were

12. In Oregon PUD stands for People's Utility District. "Public Utility Districts" is the Washington term.

extended (Vogel 2008b; Lee, Klemka, and Marts 1980; Dean and Schultz 1989; Swainson 1979 is the classic work on the conflict between British Columbia and federal Canada).¹³

The third major change came in the late 1970s, when the regional power system came close to unraveling out of its own self-promotional inertia. The long push to build more and more generation, in order to sell increasing volumes of power, for ever-expanding economic development, had led in the late 1960s to plans by both public and private utilities in the Pacific Northwest to build nuclear power plants. Public utilities had little capital with which to finance such an endeavor so naturally turned to the biggest player in the regional power system, the one with the deepest pockets and the provider for many of them, the BPA. The BPA had no legal authority to invest in new generation, but enthusiastically supported, indeed in many ways led, the effort to invest in and build nuclear power generators. It found a convoluted way to financially back the construction of the first three planned public utility-owned nuclear plants, and helped negotiate financial arrangements for the remaining two (Pope 2008; Lee, Klemka, and Marts 1980).¹⁵

Supporting nuclear power seemed to fit well with the BPA's mission as practiced since the Raver years, in which broad regional good was seen as furthered by the expansion of the power marketing program. Ironically, though, it would have weakened the ties between the Pacific Northwest region and Columbia River, because it would have made Columbia River hydropower less fundamental.¹⁶ But the nuclear program suffered

13. There was yet another geographical irony about the agreements that accompanied the treaty. The large volumes of power that would soon be generated did not have a market in the Pacific Northwest, and so an intertie was built to southern California. This, however, threatened Pacific Northwest control of the Columbia River and its power, though. Pacific Northwest interests had enough political power to require that an intertie would be accompanied by statutory Pacific Northwest *regional* preference in BPA power sales (Vogel 2008b).

14. With these agreements, finally, the Columbia River-centered Pacific Northwest finally became codified – all areas in the U.S. within 75 miles the Columbia Basin divide (Vogel 2008b; Pacific Northwest Regional Preference Act 1964). This latter extension allowed a rural electric cooperative which straddled the divide in Montana to receive BPA power (Busch 1976).

15. All five plants depended on municipal bonds for financing.

16. Hydropower would be used to provide peaking capacity beyond the baseload which would be met by the thermal plants. As Kai Lee and two collaborators noted in their incisive 1980 history and analysis of the Pacific Northwest energy system, there seemed to be little concern for the physical and ecological implications for this on the

the same kinds of problems as similar efforts nationwide: costs ballooned and timelines lengthened in the face of construction difficulties and safety and complex environmental analyses. By the late 1970s, the problems were reaching crisis proportions. The public utilities were beginning to run out of money. With little nuclear power coming on line, the BPA warned first private utilities, then Direct service industries, then even public utilities, that it was running out of power and would soon have to reduce contracts. Then, at the same time that jaw-dropping escalations in price tags were stunning the nuclear plants' sponsors, alternate regional energy demand projections began to suggest that with increased energy prices (themselves made necessary by the financial disaster of the nuclear program) and an active program of energy conservation, existing regional power supplies – the majority still produced by dams on the Columbia River and its tributaries – might be more than adequate for some time (Pope 2008; Lee, Klemka, and Marts 1980).¹⁷

All the usual parties now had reason to want a congressional fix. BPA and its public utility dependents wanted to increase the agency's authority to allow it to finance new generation. Frustrated Pacific Northwest politicians wanted a way to get objective energy demand forecasts, and they wanted to have some direct say over how expansions of the regional energy system were planned. Direct service industries wanted new long-term contracts they could rely on, even if it meant paying more. Private utilities and their allied congressional legislators wanted to be guaranteed some piece of the pie. The result was a bill which expanded BPA's authorities but made the agency responsible to a new four-state planning agency, the Pacific Northwest Power Planning and Conservation Council. The 1980 Pacific Northwest Power Planning and Conservation Act in effect created a late twentieth century version of the PNWRPC, but one with Congressional authorization, a reliable and bountiful funding source (BPA's power proceeds), and statutorily backed real influence over regional federal management of the Columbia River and regional federal power policy in the Pacific Northwest (*Northwest Power Act* 1980).

river. Meeting peak loads with hydro would mean far greater daily and seasonal fluctuations in river flows below the upriver storage dams (Lee, Klemka, and Marts 1980).

17. They proved to be correct.

In the broad deal that was made to get everyone in the regional Congressional delegation on board, direct service industries won long-term contracts, and private utilities won BPA power for their residential and small farm customers. At the very end of the legislative negotiations, a new set of interests – or an old set of interests, simply too often shunted aside – broke in to the mix. Salmon populations were declining precipitously, and Native American tribes had won a series of court victories upholding their treaty-reserved rights to fish. Critics found an ally in the critical House committee chair John Dingell of Michigan, who had come to visit the Pacific Northwest and been inspired when he had gone fishing. He refused to let any bill out of committee that did not include provisions for protection of Columbia River fish and wildlife (Blumm 2002). The resulting law authorized the new Pacific Northwest Power Planning and Conservation Council to develop not only regional power plans but also a program to “protect, mitigate and enhance” the fish and wildlife affected by the Columbia River system’s dams (*Northwest Power Act* 1980). The fish and wildlife program was to be developed from the recommendations of state and federal fish and wildlife agencies, and Native American tribes. Though the Columbia River-centered Pacific Northwest still was organized around electric power and the BPA as the core of regional well-being, its goal of environmental well-being had grown and shifted to embrace natural ecosystems and abundant natural fish and wildlife populations; and its participants now included state and tribal fish and wildlife agencies. The late 1990s logo of the Pacific Northwest Electric Power Planning and Conservation Council reflected this new environmentally inclusive vision of the region (figure 5.1).

The Columbia River-centered Pacific Northwest that emerged with the passage of the 1980 Pacific Northwest Power Planning and Conservation Act was a clear institutional heir to the region conceived by the PNWRPC and built by the BPA and its allies in the intervening decades, but it was also altered in some fundamental ways. The centrality of the BPA and the Federal Columbia River Power System in that region was affirmed. But there were added new participants and goals. These additions reflected broad larger-scale cultural, political and legal changes: the now widely accepted claim of private business that it too could be the bearer of public welfare, and the new ascendancy

of concern for wild species and ecosystems. The success of Native American tribes in the Pacific Northwest in claiming the need to redress historic wrongs also reflected a broader concern with redressing oppression toward racial minorities.

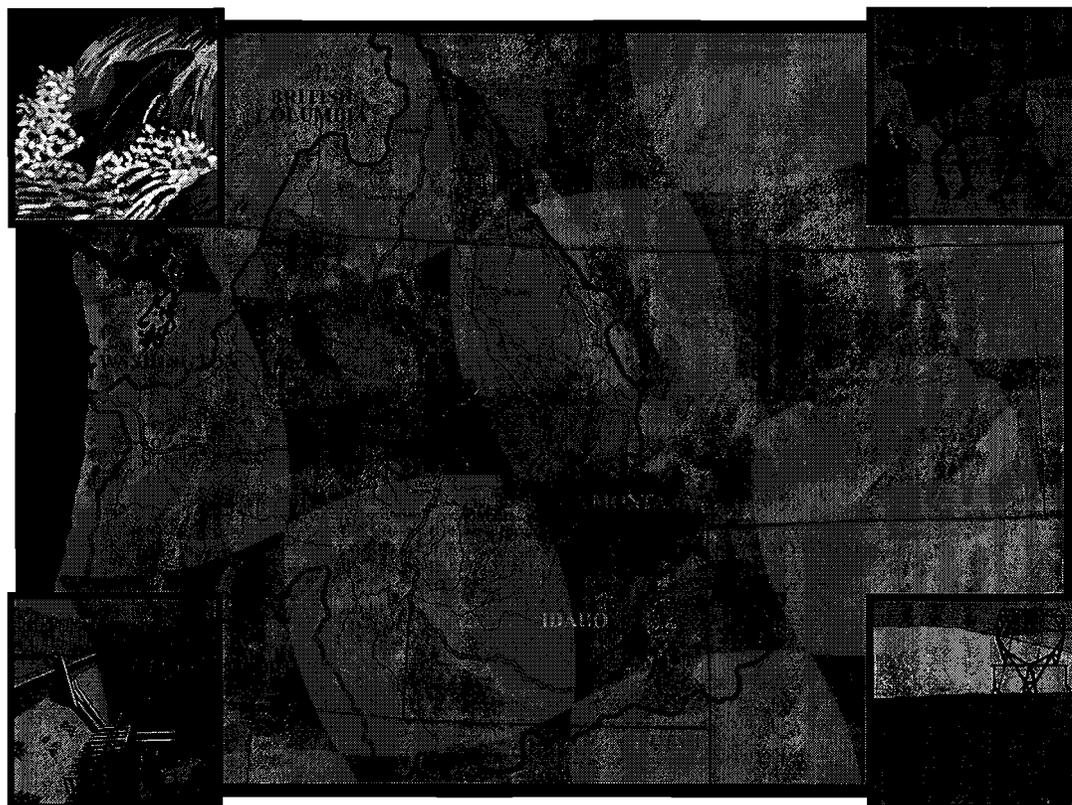


Figure 5.1. Pacific Northwest Electric Power Planning and Conservation Council logo, circa 1999. Courtesy Northwest Power and Conservation Council.

The ideal of the region, and of its bond between the region and the river, were stronger than ever. The notion of the Pacific Northwest as a place for all – all people and places, and now people and nonhuman species as well – was affirmed; the link between this idea and the Columbia River had been reinforced. The question that was left was whether regionalism put into law and practice in a set of interconnected regional institutions, most centrally a regional federal power agency and a new regional interstate planning council, could actually achieve regionalist goals.

CHAPTER VI

UNRAVELING? COORDINATING OR DIVVYING UP THE COLUMBIA RIVER’S PACIFIC NORTHWEST, 1980-PRESENT

INTRODUCTION

In the early twenty-first century, the Columbia River-centered Pacific Northwest is still significant. A host of regional institutions have grown up around the BPA and the Pacific Northwest Electric Power and Conservation Planning Council (NWPPCC)¹. Together, they encompass nine federal agencies, four states and thirteen tribes, the region’s utilities (both public and private), the remaining “direct service” industries or DSIs, a consortium of public interest groups (the Northwest Energy Coalition),² and, most recently, a network of some sixty “subbasin” management planning groups throughout the Columbia Basin with representatives from hundreds of communities, interests and institutions. The many regional groups are still organized around the notion that together, they serve or constitute a region unified by a common river system and a regional electric power system centered around the Columbia River’s dams. Inexpensive Columbia River power is still seen as the region’s “lifeblood” (e.g. Wyden 2005; Craig

1. The Pacific Northwest Electric Power and Conservation Planning Council for over two decades was called by the abbreviated name, Northwest Power Planning Council. Recently it switched to a slightly different abbreviation, the Northwest Power and Conservation Council. It is the full name, designated by the statute that created it, which best reflects its legacy from the PNWRPC, so I have used that when I have spelled out the name. However, for the sake of brevity I will hereinafter mostly use an acronym derived from its current abbreviated name: the NWPPCC. (The NWPPCC tends to call itself either “the Council” or NPCC.)

² The Northwest Energy Coalition was initially formed in response to the Northwest Power Act, and its first name was the Northwest Conservation Act Coalition. Today it comprises over one hundred diverse groups: environmental, good-government, advocates for low-income energy consumers, unions, faith-based organizations and “progressive” utilities (Steven Weiss, personal communication, 2007).

2007) but salmon and other fish and wildlife and their human advocates have become central players in the region and major beneficiaries of its resources. There is rhetoric from many quarters about the Pacific Northwest that is reminiscent of New Deal regionalism, though now with a more ecological emphasis: the Pacific Northwest as a single large, diverse community, tied to the river as an integrated ecological and social system. If the region works together and includes all voices, the argument goes, if it respects the interconnections and interdependencies of its shared river, then it can further shared social and environmental benefit (Lee 1993, 1995; Cone 1995; Committee on Protection and Management of Pacific Northwest Anadromous Salmonids 1996; Wolf and Zuckerman 2003).

In the current era, though, the practice and politics of the institutions at the core of the Columbia River-centered Pacific Northwest region, and of region-river unity – the BPA, the Federal Columbia River Power System, and the NWPCC – face new disintegrating forces. Disintegrating forces include the increasing global mobility of electricity-dependent industries, neoliberal policy pushes for greater market liberalization of electric power, pressure on the BPA from the presidential administration and other states to raise rates, federal environmental laws, national environmental mobilization, and recurrent litigation in federal courts. These disintegrating forces threaten to break down any remaining sense of regional cohesion and instead subsume the region into broader spatial scales. In addition there are both old and new fights within the region over how to run the river and the regional power system. Many would prefer to break out of a regional system they see as constraining, inefficient, expensive, and run by someone else, while others seek a fundamental overturning of priorities from electric power to natural ecosystems and wild fish.

There are, nevertheless, also re-integrating forces. Integrating forces include a resurgent enthusiasm since the 1990s for organizing environmental planning and management along river system lines; the continued benefits of BPA power, appreciated especially since the 2001 West Coast energy crisis demonstrated that deregulated energy prices are not necessarily cheaper; BPA money, for BPA now funds the vast majority of

fish and wildlife expenditures in the Columbia Basin; and the simple fact that a huge number of long-time institutional, political, personal and economic relationships are organized within the geography of the Columbia River-centered Pacific Northwest region. Further, as suggested in Chapter One, the forces that threaten to subsume the river and its benefits into broader-than-regional spatial scales often also end up acting, ironically, as integrating forces, by provoking a certain amount of circling-the-wagons regional protectiveness. There are many reasons, then, that the Columbia River-centered Pacific Northwest hangs together more than seventy years after its conception, and plays a major role in shaping the content, conception, players and possibilities for the management of the Columbia River and for the future of the three-and-a-half-state Pacific Northwest which claims the river as its own.

This chapter examines several very current controversies and efforts in this light, in order to understand the current significance of the Columbia River-centered Pacific Northwest for the river and for the region. I focus on the two broad policy realms in which analysts and policymakers organize thinking and practice within and around the Columbia River-centered Pacific Northwest, at least much of the time: electric power and salmon. There are five broad ways in which current salmon and electric power policy and debates are directed, constrained and structured by or in response to the continuing power of the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest and its specific geographical, institution, political and physical-environmental arrangements. I organize the chapter addressing each in turn, providing an overview first of the basic idea and then of the ways it has played out in specific policy debates, political and legal negotiations, and in implemented practice in the river. Here I summarize each.

First and perhaps most fundamentally, salmon planning and management is largely organized within the geography of the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest. Behind this geography are two basic characteristics of salmon efforts that reflect this regional conception and the way it has long been institutionalized. First, management of the Columbia River system for salmon tends to prioritize inexpensive Columbia River power first and foremost. Second, the BPA is the central source of salmon funding – and

to a large extent the leader in salmon policy decision-making as well. But it is also the case that salmon protection and mitigation efforts have become integral parts of the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest.

I illustrate the dominance of the geography of the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest with an analysis of a federal salmon recovery map from 1999, as policy-makers deliberated whether to breach four dams on the lower Snake River for salmon; and a corresponding analysis of how the regionalization of salmon within the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest, as depicted in the map, shaped the decision-making process.

The second way that current salmon and electric power policy and debates are shaped and constrained by, while also partially remolding, the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest, is that the continuing prioritization of inexpensive electric power as the most fundamental and most regional of river benefits, and the resulting need to protect the Federal Columbia River Power System and the BPA, limits options for salmon restoration. Most clearly, it means there is tremendous resistance to undertaking any fundamental change in the configuration of the mainstem river's dams, such as breaching dams or drawing down reservoirs, in order to help salmon. These dams are, after all, the source of most of the BPA's electric power, and fundamental changes would reduce power generation, thus diminishing the core regional resource. Also, it is feared that the costs of such changes would be borne by the BPA and its customers, and this would mean higher electric rates. If rates rise enough, the Pacific Northwest's electricity price advantage – the whole motivation for a regional power system – could disappear. These basic economic considerations are compounded further by the fact that fundamental changes to federal dams would likely require congressional authorization and this suggests a deep political threat to the BPA itself.

To show how this principle affects policy and practice, I trace the push for changes to dam operations, and increasingly, for reservoir drawdown or dam removal, over the last quarter century. For twelve years, from 1982 to 1994, this push was focused on and by the NWPC's fish and wildlife program; after that, the effort turned to NOAA Fisheries and its program to protect salmon listed under the Endangered Species Act.

Twice – once in 1994 by the NWPCC and once in 2000 by NOAA Fisheries – plans were offered up that aimed to move toward reservoir drawdown or breaching dams. Both plans were quickly sidelined, though, by the BPA and its allied agencies, or by regional politicians committed to maintaining cheap hydropower. Since 2000, the push for breaching dams has produced ongoing litigation and back-room deal-making, not any kind of policy decision to change the basic operation of dams. I turn back to the paradoxes set up in Chapter One and suggest that the best strategy for salmon advocates to achieve major changes to dams on the river may well be to work *within* rather than against the regional politics of the regional power system; this might change the whole tenor of this game. Salmon advocates themselves have had a similar realization and are at present shifting their political strategy accordingly (Steven Weiss, personal communication, 2007).

The third way in which current salmon and electric power policy and debates reflect the continuing power of the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest, is that as legal and political pressure to protect and restore fish and wildlife in the Columbia Basin has grown, the most legally powerful salmon advocates have joined, rather than toppled, the BPA-centered regional river management system. In the process they have fundamentally reshaped the priorities of the region but have also been constrained by it. Because of the provisions of the Northwest Power Act and various court decisions, the actors and organizations that have the greatest legal rights to influence Columbia River salmon policy are the four state and two federal fish and wildlife agencies, and the thirteen federally recognized Native American tribes within the United States portion of the Columbia Basin. Their legal power, their political influence in presidential administrations and Congress, and their divergent priorities for river management all threaten the BPA and power-centered management of the Columbia River. In response, BPA has appeased these potential opponents and critics much as it did and does the opponents of public power – with a generous spreading of BPA benefits. In this case, the benefit is BPA money rather than power; BPA spends vast sums on fish and wildlife protection, enhancement and mitigation, the bulk of it distributed to state and tribal fish

and wildlife budgets. There is a continuing negotiation between these actors and organizations and the BPA: they regularly threaten to sue, and sometimes carry out the threat; the BPA often responds with more generous funding.

I elaborate this point by describing broadly the development of fish and wildlife project funding. Not long after the Northwest Power Act passed, the four state fish and wildlife agencies and the thirteen Columbia Basin tribes formed their own organization, the Columbia Basin Fish and Wildlife Authority (Columbia Basin Fish and Wildlife Authority 2007), in order to produce consensus recommendations for the NWPPC's fish and wildlife program. Consensus was not so easy to come by; this effort, much like the early Pacific Northwest Regional Planning Commission's work, produced recommendations, and ultimately a fish and wildlife program, that was essentially an inclusive and expansive list of projects and activities desired by each of the organization's members. Under the Northwest Power Act, the BPA is responsible for funding measures to mitigate the impacts of the Columbia River's dams. When a report found that most of the decline of Columbia River salmon was caused by the river's dams, the BPA was on the line for funding most of the fish and wildlife program. By the mid-1990s the NWPPC fish and wildlife program's project list had ballooned and was costing the BPA well over one hundred million dollars per year. At that point, political critics moved in to provide some financial limits on the program, as well as scientific review for proposed projects. The BPA still funds a large array of projects, helping to pay the budgets of fish and wildlife agencies around the basin, but there is now some "discipline" to the process. Ironically, in the latest round of negotiations over federal salmon management under the Endangered Species Act – an act often thought to have clear and non-negotiable biological mandates – this discipline has broken down. The BPA has been busy making deals with fish and wildlife agencies and tribes around the basin, offering – what else? – more generous and committed funding, in return for promises not to sue.

Fourth, a new interpretation of the regionalist ideal has been layered on top of the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest: that of an ecologically interconnected and thriving river ecosystem, which can provide bountiful fisheries and natural amenities for people

throughout the basin, and is supported by wide participation and negotiation among multiple needs. Since 1996 and the advent of scientific review of the NWPCC's program, this new vision of the regionalist ideal has also come with an analytical framework that emphasizes the need to support broad-scale physical and ecological functions and processes that can create and sustain productive habitats and species. This kind of process and structure-based framework and perspective is perhaps the first attempt in seven decades to take on the real forces that drive the relationships among different places and parts within the region. It continues to be almost entirely lacking in the social realm. But although in much of the popular press and literature this new ecological regionalism vision has become *the* regionalist (now bioregionalist) vision for the Columbia River-centered Pacific Northwest, underneath it the organization of regional collaboration and river management still rest most fundamentally on the BPA and its distribution of inexpensive power, and now, money.

Building on the "conceptual foundation" proposed in 1996 by a group of independent scientists, in which fish and wildlife management should aim to support the processes, functions and connections of a "normative" river, the NWPCC in 2000 launched a basin-wide effort to produce some sixty individualized yet collectively integrated "subbasin plans." I provide an initial evaluation and analysis of the successes and failures of this effort's central regionalist goals as of summer 2007. So far, it appears that although there is now an analytical framework for thinking about the physical and ecological processes that might create what a group of independent scientists called a "normative river," implementing the framework in river management remains almost as difficult to achieve as the old social visions of, say, urban-rural balance. Real integration and structural change is far more technically difficult and politically contentious than distributed largesse. This is an ongoing effort though, and the one with perhaps the most promise to achieve some real collective good, if slowly and haltingly, for the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest.

The final way that current policy and debates are shaped by or have begun to reshape the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest suggests the potential for the most

profound change, though change promises to be slow and cautious. The many customers of the BPA, as well as other interests which receive or benefit from BPA power and money, are in a multi-year deliberative effort to divvy up BPA power into atomized parts, while still retaining the basic benefits of a regional federal power system: cheap power for all power customers in the region, and money to meet public purposes, including energy conservation and fish and wildlife funding. The effort is founded on the principle that BPA should play less of a dominant role in electric power supply and distribution, and that electric power markets should and will be liberalized. But reducing the role of the BPA while retaining a regional – if parceled-out – monopoly on cheap federal Columbia River power is a very tricky political endeavor, one that carries inherent risks of provoking either internal mistrust or external intervention. Far too many relationships and institutions have been built around the BPA to disappear overnight, even if the BPA power were privatized or de-regionalized tomorrow. Still, the slow reduction in importance of the BPA, the cautious effort to break free of its influence, suggests a slow unraveling of the core basis of the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest.

I examine two specific deliberations that may result in a considerable remaking – or perhaps disintegration – of the regional system of power management and allocation. First is litigation and a recent court decision which undercuts the deal between private and public power utilities that was codified in the 1980 Northwest Power Act, in which private utilities receive BPA subsidies meant to lower electric rates for their residential and small farm customers. The disintegration of the “residential exchange” program threatens to end support for the BPA and the regional power system from regional private utilities and the jurisdictions they serve – most importantly the city of Portland and the state of Oregon. Second is an ongoing “regional dialogue” in which BPA customers and others are working to divvy up BPA's power, effectively individualizing, indeed almost privatizing, this shared regional resource. While the first suggests a complete breakup of the regional power system “family,” the second looks like a family in which the kids each earn set annual dividends from the family estate, but use them individually to set up households on their own.

Ultimately, my central question is whether regional coordination and organization actually still in some ways contribute to positive regionalist aims. I define these broadly, befitting the widely varying way they have been and are defined. I ask: does the ongoing practice of the region, and regional organization of river management, bring about wide participation and broad social and environmental benefit? And, given the potential unraveling of the regional power system and the possible repercussions for salmon conservation as well as power politics: what benefits or costs might *de*-regionalization bring to democratic participation and to social and environmental outcomes?

In this chapter, I draw from my considerable experience living and working in the Pacific Northwest since 1991, including two temporary jobs working on salmon policy – one for an environmental group, Oregon Wild (then the Oregon Natural Resources Council) and one for the NWPPC (then abbreviated NWPPC for Northwest Power Planning Council). In those jobs I worked on three specific efforts or issues: a late-1990s push to get federal agencies to breach the four lower Snake River dams to help endangered Snake River salmon; the development of the 2000 NWPPC Fish and Wildlife Program; and a 2001-2002 lawsuit in which the BPA was accused of failing to provide equitable treatment for fish and wildlife during the 2000-2001 energy crisis, as required by the 1980 Northwest Power Act.³ Between 1998 and 2006, I also conducted a series of about thirty informal interviews with policymakers, former and current employees of federal, state and tribal agencies, and interest group leaders, traveling as far from my homes in Portland and Eugene, Oregon, as Boise, Idaho, Kimberley, British Columbia and Washington D.C. Both my work and these conversations helped me gain much deeper and more nuanced understanding of river and salmon policy and politics (see Chapter One). Over the years, I have kept up with Columbia River policy and political news through newspapers and the able reporting of specialist periodicals, especially the *Columbia Basin Bulletin*; and through continued contact with my former colleagues at the

3. My role in the “equitable treatment” litigation was to comb and analyze the administrative record for the NWPPC. It was not a party in the lawsuit but was concerned to make sure that neither side made claims seen as harmful to the NWPPC. The briefs filed indicate that the parties took care to avoid this (John Shurts, email communication, 2007).

Northwest Power and Conservation Council, especially general counsel and my former boss, John Shurts, and Information Officer John Harrison. For this chapter, I supplemented this broad background with over a dozen conversations with policymakers, analysts and interest groups about very current issues and future possibilities. Although most agreed to have their names used, there has not been sufficient time to check particular language with them and so, in the interests of caution, I have left out names of interview sources in relation to most specific information.

REGIONAL FRAMING OF SALMON

An important indicator of the continuing power of the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest is that questions about salmon management have been largely framed within this region's geography. For all the change in focus and priorities, and all the myriad institutions and laws that govern salmon policy (Wilkinson and Connor 1983; Committee on Protection and Management of Pacific Northwest Anadromous Salmonids 1996), a large portion of the analysis, thinking, hopes, and institutions of salmon management are organized along the lines of the three-and-a-half-state Pacific Northwest.

As suggested in Chapter I, a 1999 map of federal salmon recovery illustrates this point (figure 6.1). Federal salmon recovery is framed⁴ as a unit within the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest, or, more specifically, the BPA's service region.

This geographical framing matters. In the federal recovery strategy associated with this map (Federal Caucus 2000c), people and agencies within this geography were the main ones invited to participate in decision-making (Northwest Fisheries Science Center 1999; Federal Caucus 2000d; National Marine Fisheries Service 2000).⁵ This of course is a large part of the purpose of this geographical framing: it encompasses all of the parties with interests in federal Columbia River power into the decision-making, but

4. See Mansfield and Haas (2006), as well as Vogel (2008a) on "scale framing" of environmental policy.

5. A nine-agency constellation of federal agencies organized within the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest brought in representatives from the four states and the basin's tribes for consultation, and conducted fifteen regional public hearings around the three-and-a-half-state Pacific Northwest (Northwest Fisheries Science Center 1999; Federal Caucus 2000d; National Marine Fisheries Service 2000).

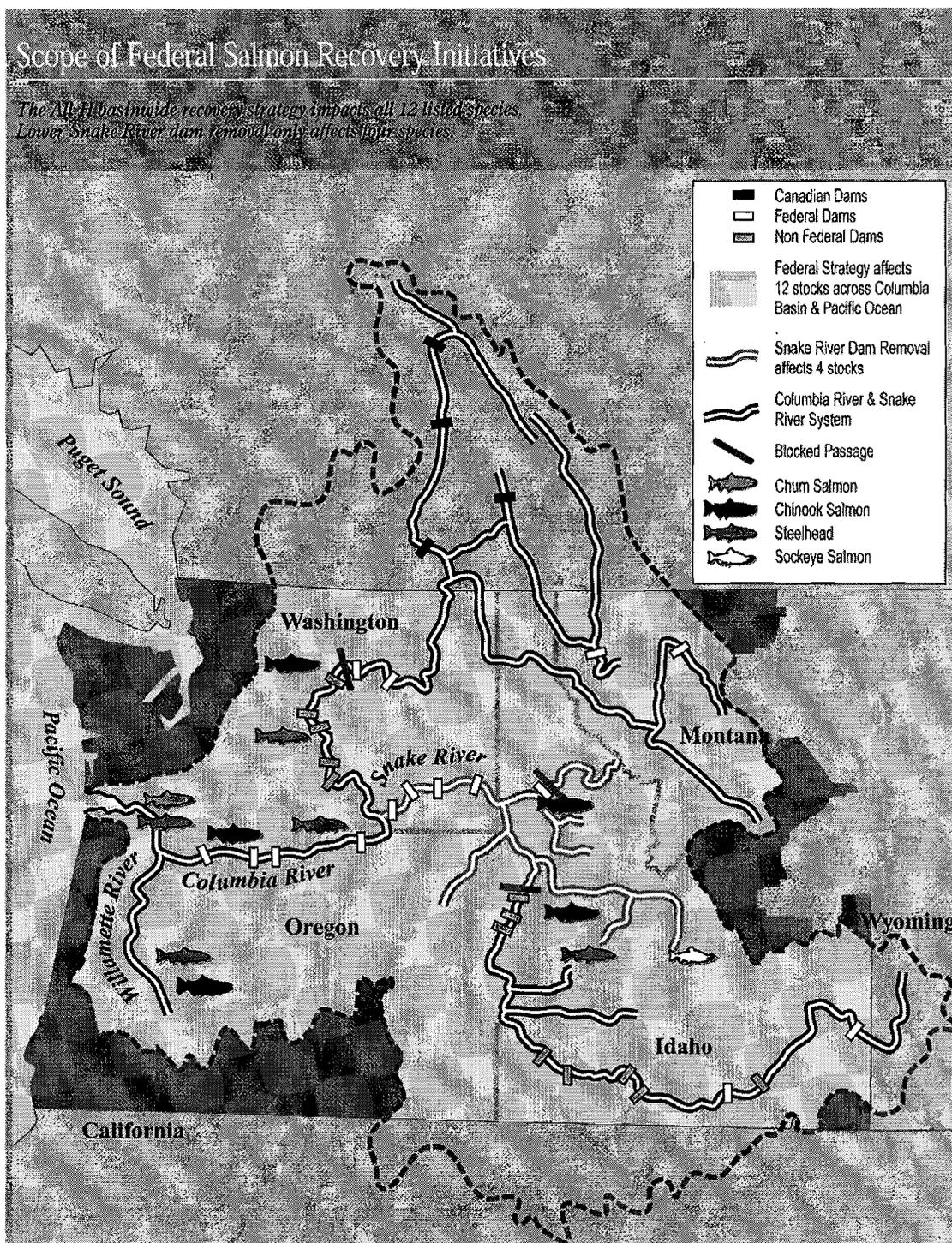


Figure 6.1. Federal Salmon Recovery Strategy Map. As this map suggests, Columbia Basin and Pacific Northwest salmon recovery is framed within the BPA service region. See also Figure 1.1. *Source:* Federal Caucus 2000a.

not others. This geographical framing affected not only who participated but also what they considered. Larger-scale interconnections relevant to Columbia River salmon ecologies such as problems of ocean harvest or ocean habitat were managed in other forums.⁶ At the same time, problems unique to smaller scales were written off as not representative. As suggested by the map subtitle, this was the argument made at the time by the federal agencies about the lower Snake River dams: since these dams affected only four “evolutionarily significant units,” out of thirteen listed under the ESA in the Columbia Basin, they did not deserve priority.

The geographical framing has helped policy-makers evade the undesired action of breaching the lower Snake River dams. On the other hand, it has kept the focus on the Columbia River dams and the Columbia River basin as the places to look for improvements for salmon (see Vogel 2008a).

PROTECTING HYDROPOWER DAMS

Background: Management Debates

Today, the most visible regional management effort on the Columbia River is the effort to protect wild salmon – that is, salmon that reproduce and rear in the rivers, streams and lakes of the Columbia Basin. This focus alone marks a major shift since the 1930s and 1940s, and reflects, of course, the much broader and longer transformation in public attitudes and government policies toward valuing and protecting nonhuman species and ecosystems.

The problem for salmon is, as in so many other cases, that recovery of self-sustaining populations to levels that existed prior to river and watershed development is near impossible, and in the face of that basic fact, interpretations of what *is* possible, what

6. Actually, even harvest in the river is largely managed in another forum. This has to do with the way the ESA is practiced, offering “Biological Opinions” for particular agency “actions” before species recovery plans are put together; and it has also to do with the particular legal history in which each developed. Harvest management in the Columbia River comes out of court cases over fishing regulations by the states of Oregon and Washington, and is to this day overseen by courts (see Goodman 2000 for an interesting discussion of how court oversight ensures tribal “co-management”).

should be the goal, how much we should be willing to cut into other interests in order to reach a particular interpretation of our goals – all these are fundamentally, irreconcilably contested.

Environmentalists critics, as well as many fish and wildlife scientists and agency managers, argue that the operation of the Columbia River system's dams needs to change fundamentally – fish need higher flows, more “spill” over dams, and probably drawdowns of reservoirs, perhaps breaching the lower Snake or other dams; without this, salmon will not recover. They have made this an economic argument in the last decade, too – arguing that the huge sums spent on salmon recovery could be saved if populations were to become self-sustaining, and in the long run, the cost would be less.⁷ They see the essential problem as recalcitrance on the part of the federal agencies that operate and regulate the Columbia River system's dams (the BPA, Army Corps of Engineers, Bureau of Reclamation, and Federal Energy Regulatory Commission),⁸ itself motivated in large part by resistance from the businesses and other interests that benefit from the dams, and the foot-dragging of politicians who are too beholden to these. They were particularly fixated for about two decades on one central problem: slow water velocity which extends juvenile salmon migration time; but the solution to that problem they settled on a decade ago, the removal of the four lower Snake River dams, has since taken on its own broader life and meaning. They see salmon protection and restoration efforts in the Columbia Basin as a failure, and have particularly little patience for the federal agencies' “techno-fix” solutions to migration difficulties for juvenile salmon.

Utility groups and many business groups that are beneficiaries of the river's dams, on the other hand, argue that the costs of salmon restoration are unreasonable, and unreasonably placed upon the region's electric customers or ratepayers. They argue that the huge sums spent on salmon in the Columbia River derive from political deal-making

7. I myself worked on one of the earlier reports arguing to this effect, contributing enough editing and interpretive text that I became co-author (Lansing and Vogel 1998).

8. The BPA manages the federal dams to a considerable degree, but the dams are still owned and operated by the Army Corps of Engineers and the Bureau of Reclamation. The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission licenses and regulates the many non-federal dams in the river system.

among fish and wildlife agencies, environmentalists, and politicians, who collectively refuse to accept the benefits of hatcheries and a “fish transportation” program that puts juvenile fish on barges and transports them down river through dams’ locks to avoid their turbines, or to address seriously the losses salmon face from harvest and their journey through the Pacific Ocean (Buchal 1998).

Both sides say we need to look to science: we should do only what science supports as biologically effective, and can therefore be justified.

The scientists, for their part, have spoken – though their considerable efforts have not, unsurprisingly, solved either the biological or the political problem. In a seminal report in 1996 (ISG 1996), edited and reissued in new form in 2000 (ISG 2000) and 2006 (William 2006), a group of independent scientists called for a focus on natural, dynamic processes and interconnection, rather than on specific numbers of salmon or exact types of habitat. To the extent possible, they concluded, dams should be operated and the river managed to support and renew the broad-scale hydrological and geomorphological processes and connections that make and sustain habitat, and support interrelated “metapopulations.” The difficulties lie in implementing strategies to address such goals. The river ecosystem and its basin are fundamentally altered in almost all places and scales, which means that huge and multitudinous changes are needed to restore natural processes and connections. Despite regional coordination in planning and funding it remains technically, logistically and politically very difficult to coordinate actual restoration of habitat and connectivity across an area the size of the Columbia Basin. Yet in some sense this has become the clearest and highest notion of regionalism in the Columbia River’s Pacific Northwest today.

The NWPCC Fish and Wildlife Program: Protecting a Region or Funding its Parts?

After the Northwest Power Act passed in late 1980, the NWPCC formed in 1981. It quickly set itself to the task of developing its first fish and wildlife program.⁹ For most

9. The NWPCC tends to develop its fish and wildlife programs before its power plans, because power plans are required to take fish and wildlife needs into consideration. Power plans are required to be written at least every five years, so the cycle of fish and wildlife programs has often been four to five years.

of the 1980s and early 1990s, the NWPCC's Fish and Wildlife Program drew adulation (Lee 1993, 1995; Blumm 1981). Here was an effort that brought together four states to plan a program to "protect, mitigate and enhance" the fish and wildlife of a giant river basin. This was not to be a political-business-as-usual arrangement of formulating plans that would decline to challenge the states' biggest economic interests or the hegemony of hydropower. No, the program was to be based on the recommendations not of state governors or legislatures, not of federal power managers, not of big business interests, but state and federal fish and wildlife agencies. Equally considered, too, would be the recommendations of the Columbia Basin's Native American tribes. These provisions meant, many thought, that the fish and wildlife program would be developed based upon the ideas of those who knew the most and cared the most about salmon and other fish and wildlife species. The provisions also seemed to amount to considerable social justice: the too-long marginalized Native American tribes and peoples of the basin, who had for millennia sustained themselves on salmon and in treaties in the 1800s had reserved for perpetuity their right to fish, would now finally be returned to their rightful place as co-managers of the river.

The four state program, guided by the many fish and wildlife managers, work also would together toward a collective purpose – the act directed them as much as possible to consider the river as "a system."

The NWPCC was called by many "an experiment in federalism" – almost always with the sense that it was not so much an experiment as a solution, an institutional arrangement which broke down problematic jurisdictional separation and hierarchies. This collective, participatory *interstate* program would also have considerable influence on the *federal* agencies which owned, operated, regulated and managed the river's dams.

The language of the act was clear that the fish and wildlife program might adjust hydropower operations, particularly flows, in ways that would assist fish. The act also made it clear that these changes were expected to make a considerable difference for fish. Fish and wildlife were to receive "equitable treatment" with power.

But it wasn't just the language of the act; the people of the NWPCC and the participants in its deliberations were filled with an enthusiasm that they were part of something revolutionary and something wonderful – something both idealistic and pragmatic, willing to see all parts of the whole – its different places, its different interests, its different actors.¹⁰ The whole was, of course, the Columbia River, and the region which claimed the river as its own: Washington, Oregon, Idaho and western Montana¹¹. Though the members, staff and supporters of the NWPCC did not often draw the links to the PNWRPC they clearly saw themselves as embodying a kind of regionalism.

*Ideals and Realities: What the Fish and Wildlife Program Could and Could Not Do, 1982-1994*¹²

In the first fish and wildlife program, put together in 1982, there was considerable enthusiasm for the NWPCC's novel approach.¹³ The 1982 fish and wildlife program initiated the "water budget," in which water from upriver storage dams was released during the seasons when salmon migrated (Northwest Power Planning Council 1982). The water budget returned a bit more of the natural seasonal peak.

The next fish and wildlife program was released in 1987. It followed a report that said that losses to Columbia River salmon were huge, and hydropower dams were responsible for the vast majority of these losses. Ironically, the latter piece of information was in one sense good news for the NWPCC, for the Northwest Power Act said that the region's ratepayers – through the BPA, whose costs would be made up with higher bills to its customers – could pay only for salmon measures that would make up for harm caused by the hydrosystem. If the vast majority of the harm were caused by the

10. The early enthusiasm of the NWPCC is reminiscent of the enthusiasm in the early BPA.

11. Montana is a full, not a half member of the Council, but there's an understanding that it is the western portion of the state which is concerned.

12. In addition to specific citations, several conversations with NWPCC general counsel John Shurts informed this section.

13. The section on the history of the NWPCC Program through the mid-1990s is built mainly from conversations with John Shurts, NWPCC General Counsel, emails and conversations with John Harrison, NWPCC Information Officer, and from Blumm et al. (1997).

hydrosystem, then most anything the NWPCC decided was important for fish could be laid upon BPA's feet to fund.

The Council decided in its 1987 fish and wildlife program that a good immediate goal was to double the basin's salmon population. How would this be done? For too many years, producing more salmon had meant mainly hatchery production in the lower river basin. The reasoning was that fish raised in lower river hatcheries would not have to face the destruction of migration through dams; and, it was generally thought, there was not much of a limit to the number of hatchery fish one could produce in the lower river, since hatcheries effectively provided their "habitat." Upriver fish and fisheries had mainly been left to decline. In contrast, the 1987 NWPCC program took more seriously the consideration of the basin as a whole. What it did not do was give up the reliance on hatcheries. It called for a program of subbasin production plans in which in each major subbasin of the large Columbia Basin, state, tribal and federal fish and wildlife managers would lead collaborative efforts to develop plans to double the runs. For the most part, the strategy to achieve that goal was artificial production – hatcheries (John Shurts, personal communication, 2007). Well over two dozen subbasins produced draft production plans by 1990.

It was in this 1987-1990 effort to develop subbasin production plans, perhaps, that the weaknesses of the institutional setup of the NWPCC and its fish and wildlife program, and the continuing political conflicts of the Columbia River-centered Pacific Northwest, began to become apparent. Or, perhaps, they have become apparent only in retrospect, based on the indictments that began to fly in the mid-1990s.

The difficulty was not only that the immediate inclination was to think of artificial production as the key to doubled production – though this indeed showed a decades-old reluctance to deal with losses to fish habitat and impeded migration caused by ubiquitous development in forms such as channelization, damming, dewatering, silting, and pollution of rivers. There was also the problem that by asking the fish and wildlife managers from states and tribes to lead the dispersed efforts in the subbasins within their territories, the basin was re-fragmented into smaller territories and jurisdictions. More

problematic still, this re-emphasis on hatcheries and this re-fragmentation were set up in a way that in a sense bought off the very agencies that were supposed to keep the program accountable. The problem was that there was no higher mandate, no objective biological goal, that the NWPCC's program was to aim for; the key was to follow the recommendations of the fish and wildlife agencies and the tribes. Hatchery production in every subbasin, managed by state and tribal agency biologists, was the kind of effort which could please all the voices the NWPCC was required to listen to in formulating its fish and wildlife program. However, it was not at all clear it could actually produce a healthy and sustainable basin-wide network of salmon populations.

Ironically, a higher mandate arrived just as the draft subbasin production plans were coming out – and it came from the hierarchical imposition of federal law: the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Petitions had been filed to list Snake River salmon under the ESA in the late 1970s, but the petitions had been withdrawn in order to allow the NWPCC's program some time to work.¹⁴ Now, over a decade later, Snake River coho salmon were extinct, Snake River sockeye virtually extinct, and Snake River Chinook salmon were in bad shape as well. The Shoshone-Bannock Tribe of southeastern Idaho led the way, petitioning for a listing of the Snake River sockeye in 1990. An early biological review made it clear that Snake River sockeye and two kinds of Snake River Chinook would almost certainly be listed under the ESA.

With ESA listings on their way, the NWPCC froze its subbasin production plans. How would increased production of hatchery fish jibe with the need to protect the genetic integrity of ESA-listed fish? This was an issue not only for the Snake River basins, but for others as well – for all the basin's fish swam through the lower Columbia River together with others of their kind that came from other tributaries.

Instead of finalizing the subbasin production plans, the Council conducted a new amendment process, and in 1991-1992 released its next fish and wildlife program in three parts. This one was given a name: the *Strategy for Salmon*. It kept the goal “double

14. The ESA had passed in 1973. The petitions for listing Snake River salmon under the ESA were part of the impetus for fish provisions in the Northwest Power Act.

salmon production” – and made it clear that population numbers would be counted at the Columbia River’s mouth – but qualified this goal, “with no appreciable risk to the biological diversity of fish populations.” Production needed to be increased, and most numbers might still be produced in the lower river, in other words, but in the process, weak upriver runs also needed to be protected. The strategy called for measures that reflected the emphasis of salmon biologists and advocates at that time on travel velocity; the first actions listed in the *Strategy for Salmon* were aimed at enhancing survival in the rivers by increasing river velocity. They included increased flow from storage dams and limited reservoir drawdowns during salmon migration, and a move toward larger drawdowns in the years to come (Northwest Power Planning Council 1992). Critics called the *Strategy for Salmon* weak, though: it had no clear biological objectives other than doubling production and avoiding risk to biological diversity, and, despite the prominence of water velocity measures, unlike the recommendations it had received from state and tribal fish and wildlife managers, its measures promised only marginal improvements in water velocity (Blumm, Schoessler, and Beckwith 1997).

When Law & Opportunity Threaten, Politics Protects: Lessons from 1994-5

In 1994, two major court decisions vindicated salmon advocates, and seemed to call for river management that would prioritize improving fish survival in the river, even if it meant a “major overhaul” of river operations (that is, dam operations). The first rejected NOAA Fisheries’ “Biological Opinion” that operation of the Federal Columbia River Power System would not “jeopardize” the newly ESA-listed Snake River salmon. The second overturned the *Strategy for Salmon*. The decision against the NWPCC’s fish and wildlife program hinged on the fact that the NWPCC had not followed the recommendations of the fish and wildlife agencies and the tribes, and yet had not clearly explained its reasons in the *Strategy for Salmon*.¹⁵

15. The Northwest Power Act lists only a few very specific reasons that recommendations from fish and wildlife managers and tribes may not be followed and directs that if they are not followed the NWPCC must explain in the program why not. While the NWPCC argued it had explained itself in scattered comments and text throughout, its reasons were mainly summarized very briefly in a separate document. The court said the NWPCC’s “findings”

What happened over the next year or so proved enormously telling about the regional – and national – politics of the Columbia River. For a brief few months, the “stars were aligned” (Shurts, phone interview, 2007) for the NWPCC to come up with a fish and wildlife program that would aggressively push for in-river conditions that salmon advocates wanted. The chair of the NWPCC and several other Council members had for some time thought the NWPCC’s fish and wildlife program should do more for fish. Idaho’s Governor Cecil Andrus had positioned himself as a major advocate for Snake River salmon, and had become a proponent of seasonal drawdowns of the lower Snake River dams.¹⁶ Seasonal drawdown of the dams offered a way to achieve faster water flows without having to release lots of water from the politically indispensable irrigation dams on the upper Snake. There was tremendous opportunity, too: NOAA Fisheries would soon be writing its new Biological Opinion, and it promised to try to follow the guidelines set by the NWPCC. The court decision against the *Strategy for Salmon* gave the pro-salmon majority on the eight-person NWPCC a justification for pushing through what it had already wanted to do (Shurts, phone interview).

The needed timing was clear. Governor Andrus would be leaving after the November 1994 elections, and with him would go the two Idaho members of the NWPCC that he appointed. Several other members of the Council who were strong supporters of in-river fish protections were on their way out, notably Chair Ted Hallock. Staff worked feverishly to get out a new fish and wildlife program before the end of the year (Shurts phone interview). The 1994 amendments to the fish and wildlife program

rejecting a recommendation must be more clearly stated in terms of the specifically authorized reasons listed in the act, and the NWPCC must adopt these findings as part of the program itself. (John Shurts, personal communication, 2007).

The court decision provided considerable guidance as to how the NWPCC was to apply various provisions from the Northwest Power Act when reconsidering its program, and strongly criticized the NWPCC for failing to defer to the recommendations of the state fish and wildlife agencies and tribes. The court’s additional guidance shook up the NWPCC and pleased salmon advocates, but it was not entirely clear whether this guidance was part of the court’s formal legal ruling or non-binding “dicta” (John Shurts, personal communication, 2007).

16. This was before a drawdown test and an economic feasibility study (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers 1996) made it clear that, unthinkable as dam removal had been before, it was actually preferable to seasonal reservoir drawdowns.

were approved by the NWPCC in December.¹⁷ The new program called for higher flow velocity targets, seasonal drawdowns of the reservoirs of two lower Snake River dams and the John Day Dam¹⁸ on the lower Columbia, higher spill levels, reduced fish transportation, and conscious “adaptive management” that would use these varying measures as experiments to test how they affected juvenile salmon survival (Northwest Power Planning Council 1994; Blumm, Schoessler, and Beckwith 1997).

Soon, the NWPCC’s fish and wildlife director was meeting with the new regional head of NOAA Fisheries, trying to get it to adopt these measures in its new Biological Opinion (Shurts).

But too much changed in the 1994 elections. This was the election that brought in Newt Gingrich and the Republican Revolution. In the Pacific Northwest, Idaho elected a Republican governor who aimed not only to protect Idaho’s irrigation water but also the economic interests in Lewiston that depended on the lower Snake River dams. Two new, more dam-friendly council members were brought in. By the end of 1995, both of Oregon’s council members and one of Washington’s had been replaced. The authority of the NWPCC to enforce its program on the BPA and the other federal agencies had always been uncertain (Blumm, Schoessler, and Beckwith 1997), but the reconstituted 1995 NWPCC would not push the issue (Shurts). Nor would NOAA Fisheries in 1995 offer anything as radical as what the 1994 NWPCC had done, despite the efforts of the NWPCC fish and wildlife director (Shurts)¹⁹ – nor would it force the federal agencies that operated, managed and regulated the river’s dams to follow its Biological Opinion completely, despite the ESA’s supposedly mandatory nature and inflexibility. There was

17. The vote was 6-2 with both Montana members opposed. NWPCC voting rules require a 6-2 majority if both members of one state oppose. In other words, a 5-3 vote is a winning vote only if the five include one member each from all four states, plus one other.

18. Strong evidence suggests the John Day Dam, which has a sixty-mile-long reservoir, is the single dam that has most harmed salmon habitat in the mainstem Columbia and Snake Rivers – other than the ones that entirely blocked passage, that is, and cut off hundreds of miles of salmon habitat as entirely inaccessible. See the *Return to the River* reports (ISG 1996; 2000; William 2006).

19. Part of what happened as ESA listings came on the scene in the early 1990s, and it became clear after the 1994 court decision that NOAA Fisheries would have to issue a “jeopardy” opinion on the Federal Columbia River Power System, was that the strongest political pressures were now directed against NOAA Fisheries. There were soon tales of congressional representatives yelling at NOAA Fisheries biologists. See discussion below in text.

neither as much water released from storage dams nor as many or as significant reservoir drawdowns as the Biological Opinion had called for, and that was significantly less than called for in the 1994 NWPCC fish and wildlife program (Blumm, Schoessler, and Beckwith 1997).

The NWPCC, the regional body that offered an experiment in federalism, now largely withdrew from these most contentious of issues, mainstem dam operations, and left them to NOAA Fisheries, the federal dam operating and regulating agencies, and the many interests who have tied them up in court for most of years since. Environmental groups and legal analysts wrote off the NWPCC as now largely irrelevant and impotent.²⁰

Thus between 1994 and 1995 the great hopes that a four-state regional agency could fundamentally challenge “business as usual,” in the sense of pushing for major changes in the Columbia River’s hydropower dams, was largely laid to rest. For a brief moment there had been sufficient votes for a fish and wildlife program that would call for changes in the mainstem dams, and there were staff members on the Council willing and able to put such a program together. But this was a rare moment, and there were too many obstacles to allow follow-through. The constellation of votes to support measures like reservoir drawdowns and greater spill was quickly overcome. The four-state NWPCC was too fundamentally beholden to its four states, and the dominant political interests that influenced the four state governors who appointed the Council members.

20. There was no lawsuit against the NWPCC to try to push it to enforce its 1994 fish and wildlife program, nor to sue the dam operating agencies to follow it; and there have been no subsequent lawsuits against the NWPCC calling for it to make further efforts to push for changes on the mainstem. There seem to be several reasons for this. First, the NWPCC’s enforcement powers are legally uncertain, making litigation difficult; similarly, the obligations upon the dam operating and regulating agencies to follow the NWPCC’s program are vague (Blumm, Schoessler, and Beckwith 1997). Second, the one clear issue that could be won in court, and which resulted in the 1994 overturning of the *Strategy for Salmon* – that the NWPCC had to explain its reasons if it did not follow the recommendations of the fish and wildlife agencies and the tribes, in terms of the few very specific reasons allowed in the Northwest Power Act, and put them in the same volume as the fish and wildlife program – was taken fully to heart by the NWPCC’s legal staff. Every fish and wildlife program since has carefully enumerated its “findings” that explain where and why the NWPCC did not follow federal, state and tribal managers’ recommendations. (Indeed a large function of my job in working on the 2000 fish and wildlife program was to cull recommendations to prepare for the “findings” for that program.) Third, environmentalists’ turned their focus to ESA litigation, as did the tribes and states, at least in relation to mainstem operations. Within NWPCC forums the tribes and states focused on making sure their needs, recommendations and participation were taken into account in formulating the program, organizing program implementation and deciding on project funding.

Except in Oregon, these interests tended to support Columbia River dams more than altering dams to help wild salmon.²¹

Beyond the problematic politics of the four states, there was also the difficulty of the political stance and power of the federal agencies which operate and regulate the Columbia River dams. Loyal to their fundamental regional purpose, hydroelectric power, as well as their more individual constituencies, the federal agencies that operate and regulate the Columbia River dams had no intention of implementing the NWPPC's 1994 program fully – and no lawsuit and no set of politicians was going to make them do so. NOAA Fisheries, for its part, the agency responsible for the ESA, had before 1994 been a bit more independent from regional politics. Not so after. It responded to political pressure from BPA customers, dam beneficiaries, and their congressional allies at least as much as to the wisdom of the now largely departed 1994 NWPPC.

Despite all these political conflicts, constraints, and limitations, though, the NWPPC did not go away, nor did its experiment in federalism, in which representatives from four states listened to state and federal fish and wildlife agencies and Native American tribes, and then turned around to coax and encourage a set of powerful federal

21. The positions of the four states since 1995 have roughly been as follows.

Washington, because of the dominance of public power there, still draws the majority of the benefits from the federal Columbia River dams and the BPA, but the dominant fishing industry in the state does not much benefit from Columbia River salmon. Since 1995 Democratic Washington governors and their NWPPC representatives have tended to straddle the salmon-versus-dams divide by supporting strong measures for salmon that do not impact the mainstem dams too much.

Montana does not have salmon – even before the river's dams were built, there were naturally impassable barriers that prevented salmon from reaching the Montana tributaries – and yet it stood to suffer considerable consequences from mainstem salmon measures. In particular, calls for higher flows from release of storage waters meant lowering Montana reservoirs according to (lower-river) salmon's needs, not those of Montana's residents, recreation industries, irrigation, or resident fisheries.

Idaho politicians value salmon, and the huge decline in Idaho salmon because of the losses in the Snake River system explains Governor Andrus's position supporting lower Snake dam drawdowns. But Idaho politics are still driven more by Snake Basin irrigators and by the Idaho Power Company than by wild salmon, and thus Idaho is inalterably opposed to calls to release more water from Idaho reservoirs, or to tamper much with Idaho Power's dams on the middle Snake – which block what used to be excellent upstream habitat. Since Andrus's departure, Idaho's politics have been dominated by conservative Republicans – and it has been intransigently opposed to tampering with downstream dams in ways that would harm economic interests.

That leaves **Oregon**, which benefits from Columbia River salmon, has had environmentally friendly Democratic administrations, and receives considerably less from BPA and federal Columbia River power than its neighbor to the north. Since the late 1990s the NWPPC has often had one, sometimes two, Oregon Council members facing off with the rest of the group in an uncompromising antagonism. So much for a federalist experiment that can offer a solution to political gridlock or enable greater attention to basinwide salmon needs instead of to political and economic interests.

dam operating and regulating agencies to do what they asked. While the NWPCC was not going to follow the letter of all of the fish and wildlife agencies' and tribes' recommendations, it also knew it did not want further litigation – and that it needed good relations with these fish and wildlife managers. Its members and staff also took seriously their obligations toward salmon, many with considerable passion and conviction. Thus the NWPCC was obliged to find a way to address concerns and needs of the state and tribal fish and wildlife managers to a considerable extent, and to organize a strong program for the “protection, mitigation and enhancement” of salmon and other fish and wildlife, even if it would now pass the buck on the most controversial issues. And while the NWPCC did not have had clear enforcement power, it had considerable sway. The four federal agencies that operate and regulate Columbia River dams are obliged under the Northwest Power Act to take the NWPCC's fish and wildlife program “into account... to the fullest extent practicable” (*Northwest Power Act* §839b(h)(11)(A)) and, in the case of the BPA, either to act “consistent with” the program, or else potentially face a considerable legal and administrative hurdle not to (*Northwest Power Act* §839b(i)-(j)). Though these agencies did not follow the 1994 fish and wildlife program's most politically or economically difficult directives, they still went to considerable effort to do much of what the Council asked – as they had done before and would continue to do.²² They were held accountable as much by a sense of responsibility and desired good relations – and perhaps their own political fortunes in Congress (a concern especially for the regionally dependent BPA) – as by unambiguous legal obligation.

With the controversy about what should be done with the dams in the river set aside, good relations among the NWPCC, the fish and wildlife managers, and the federal Columbia River dam agencies, were largely won and kept through money. Explaining how this came to be and what it looked like requires a bit of background.

22. One of the less noted but significant examples of this is that in the late 1980s, the NWPCC drew up a list of “protected areas” – rivers and lengths of rivers that should not be developed with dams. These were not in the mainstem rivers so much as on tributaries throughout the basin. The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission has followed this list closely ever since, declining to license dams in these areas. This is especially noteworthy because FERC is often ignored as one of the agencies that is supposed to follow the NWPCC's fish and wildlife program, because the public scrutiny is so thoroughly focused on the federal dams.

The state and federal fish and wildlife agencies and the thirteen Native American tribes in the Columbia Basin were not an inherently unified bunch. The fact that all were advocates for fish and wildlife did not make them all want the same thing. In terms of how to run the dams on the river, for example, one of the key conflicts was over releases from upriver reservoirs. Essentially those on the lower river wanted more water releases during salmon migration season; those on the upper portions of the river, such as the Montana Department of Fish and Game and the Colville Tribe, were more interested in resident fish – those that do not migrate to the sea – than in salmon, for salmon never reached their territories. They also had special legal and moral claim that upriver reservoirs should be managed for their needs.²³

Despite these differences, the fish and wildlife agencies and tribes has strong motivation to put together consensus recommendations. Since the NWPCC's fish and wildlife program was supposed to be based on their recommendations, if they submitted unanimous recommendations, the NWPCC would have far less maneuvering room to justify doing something contrary to what they asked. They had formed a single organization, the Columbia Basin Fish and Wildlife Authority, in 1987, to coordinate the recommendations and ideas of the various fish and wildlife managers and to forge consensus. Often, what the managers could find agreement on most easily were lists of projects and priorities that included something for everyone. Insiders suggested that the NWPCC's program came to act as a kind of pork barrel funding mechanism, appeasing the state and tribal agencies with pet programs and a considerable portion of their budgets, rather than any kind of real system-wide perspective or overhaul.

By the mid 1990s, the BPA was spending over one hundred million dollars per year on fish and wildlife – even more by its own accounting, which included the “foregone revenue” it calculated was lost releasing water for fish and wildlife rather than

23. The Hungry Horse Dam on Montana's Flathead River was authorized with a provision – almost straight out of the Montana State Planning Board's 1936 proposal to the PNWRPC– that the water impounded by the dam should be used first for Montana's purposes. The Grand Coulee Dam, which blocked salmon passage to points upriver, was built with the promise to the Colville Tribe that the loss of salmon would be compensated by a commitment to build and support resident fish in the new Lake Roosevelt.

for power production at times of peak demand.²⁴ The attention of the state and tribal fish and wildlife managers grew to focus less on the NWPCC's positions on flow, spill and dam breaching – though these still definitely got their attention – but on the process and results of project funding decisions.

That federal money could be a something-for-everyone, peace-making solution was nothing new, of course, in the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest. It had been the hope for federal money which had brought the PNWRPC together; and it had been the federal largesse of inexpensive Columbia River power, funneled through the BPA, which had brought the region together in practice as far as it was willing to come together. The NWPCC's fish and wildlife program had simply followed this long history into a new realm.

Scientific and financial “discipline”: Reshaping the NWPCC's fish and wildlife program, 1994-1996

The NWPCC's fish and wildlife program had a different relationship to federal largesse, however, than the PNWRPC and the early BPA had had. The federal largesse funding the NWPCC came from within the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest region, for BPA's money since 1974²⁵ had come from its electric power customers, most of whom were in the Pacific Northwest. This was mainly a huge advantage for the NWPCC's fish and wildlife program: its money was far more available and reliable than it would have been had it come from congressional appropriations. The NWPCC did not have to go begging each year to Washington D.C. as had the PNWRPC and the early BPA, nor to fear being totally or partially cut off, as had been the PNWRPC and the BPA, respectively, when political tides shifted.

24. Water released from storage reservoirs could still generate power, but could not generate as much money because it was not sold at times of peak demand when power prices were highest. Water spilled over dams was a more complete loss, though of course it could still generate power at downstream dams.

25. Federal Columbia River Transmission System Act, 16 USC §838.

It also meant, though, that within the region there was a fundamental ambivalence about fish and wildlife expenditures that would not have been present if the money had come from all fifty states.

The combination of escalating costs and the controversies over the measures called for in the 1994 fish and wildlife program prompted three significant developments between 1994 and 1996, all instigated by the NWPCC, the BPA, or the Pacific Northwest congressional delegation, or some combination of the three – from actors from within the region, that is. First, the NWPCC's 1994 fish and wildlife program called for a comprehensive review of the program by independent scientists. Second, BPA and the Pacific Northwest congressional delegation created a five-year cost cap for the fish and wildlife program to help BPA manage its financial troubles. Third, Washington Senator Slade Gorton passed an appropriations rider to require independent scientific review of all actions proposed for funding by the BPA through the NWPCC's fish and wildlife program.

Together, these meant remaking the NWPCC's fish and wildlife program to a considerable extent. In short, they would force prioritization of funded projects instead of allowing endless additions, and make independent scientific review of projects a chief criterion for their funding. Although the program would still largely be built by the recommendations of the state and tribal fish and wildlife managers, their preferred projects would not go forward without passing scientific review. The independent scientists would also lay out a vision that changed how people thought about the river system and how to improve conditions for salmon – even if it would not change river management and decision-making quite as much as the scientists wanted. In a sense, it was a new way to think about Columbia River-centered regionalism. Moreover, it offered a way to structurally critique the failures of Columbia River regionalism in the biological realm that had not yet been found for the social realm.

Return to the River: *Ecology Suggests an Approach to Regionalism*

The new over-all guiding principles and “conceptual foundation” for the NWPCC’s fish and wildlife program came out of the comprehensive scientific review called for in the 1994 program. The draft scientific review came out as the 1996 *Return to the River* report by the Independent Scientific Group (1996).

The *Return to the River* report showed that inclusive representative regional democracy – and a novel approach to federalism – did not produce coherence. Nor did giving strong influence to fish and wildlife managers guarantee that the river basin and its salmon would be treated in any kind of comprehensive way. The team of independent scientists reported that the Council’s fish and wildlife program had many good ideas and actions, but no coherent overall basin-wide goals or approach.

Strategically, the Fish and Wildlife Program (FWP) is a collection of individual measures proposed by regional parties without reference to an explicit, common scientific framework or conceptual foundation... [T]he FWP represents a political agreement...

...[T]he “list” definition of the FWP... has no logical endpoint – controversy can be accommodated by simply adding new items.

...[F]ocusing on the individual items encourages interest groups to become immersed in the endless fine details, thus losing sight of the big picture. Instead of focusing on the most biologically effective and socially acceptable means of achieving a specified biological condition, the Council has been diverted by efforts of various groups to protect or promote their own interests (ISG 1996, 43-4).

The scientists thus made public some of the internal political problems of the fish and wildlife program. They also in the process critiqued structural problems with salmon restoration in the Columbia Basin that were remarkably similar to the earlier failures of regionalism in the Columbia River-centered Pacific Northwest. In both cases, there was an *idea* of a unified geographical whole, a whole that was supposedly supported by and thriving because of its interconnections and interdependencies. But the truth was that policy and politics did not support or create the large-scale processes and functions that would actually support or create such a thing. Instead, policy was driven by the many interests and representatives of particular locations and jurisdictions, and their desire to

protect particular resources or promote particular developments in the locations they knew or cared about or identified as important. A “unified” regional approach in practice was simply one that gave something to everybody.

In the biological realm, the critics could find an alternative, and voice it. The scientists proposed a new conceptual foundation for the fish and wildlife program based on a “normative river concept.” They defined a normative river as one that could achieve “the functional norms of ecological functions and processes characteristic of salmon-bearing systems,” yet still had “a mix of natural and cultural features that typifies modern society” and allowed “many of society’s present uses of the river to continue” (quote from the ISG report's 2000 update, ISG 2000, 53). In other words, the point was not to focus on the unique attributes of particular places, habitats and populations, but rather the broad processes that maintained diverse habitats and populations in a natural river system. These processes, the scientists argued, or at least their “functional norms,” might be achieved even in a developed river like the Columbia. Protecting and restoring natural river processes and functions would require an approach to river management that recognized and supported dynamic river processes, varied and patchy habitats, and interconnections among different populations in different parts of the river.²⁶

One of the most powerful analyses undertaken in the *Return to the River* report was of the assumptions – often unstated – which underlay many of the activities recommended by the NWPCC’s fish and wildlife program. After spelling out several dozen assumptions, the team then reviewed the scientific literature to determine how likely it was that the assumption was accurate. For a remarkable number, the underlying

26. In this the ISG drew from the most current science concerning salmon populations, ecology and river system dynamics – a current science to which many of the individual members of the ISG were leading contributors. A full review of this current salmon and river science is beyond the scope of this chapter, but in brief it entails a recognition of (a) dynamic environmental processes – in a river system, this includes, for example, things like floods or landslides which can dramatically remake river system connections and habitats; (b) a resulting geographic and temporal variation in habitats – collectively often described as “complex” as a shorthand for the patchy and changing nature of habitats; and c) species population dynamics and genetics that change and are interconnected over time and space as a result of this changing and patchy environment. Salmon in particular are hypothesized to live within “metapopulations” in which a core population reproduces in central, relatively reliable, productive habitat, and satellite populations exploit temporarily good habitat or struggle to exist in marginal habitat, around the core habitat. These emphases fit closely with recent broad developments in the field of ecology, which has come to see ecosystems as dynamic, patchy – and yes, “complex.” The 2006 version of the former ISG’s report, edited by Rick Williams, is a rich source for references to this extensive literature (William 2006).

assumption was either likely wrong or its accuracy unknown. In their review of the mainstem river, for example, the scientists found that juvenile salmon did not simply float down the river passively. They swam – and stopped, where there were good places to rest and hide, or paused to eat where there was good food for a juvenile fish to eat. It was these opportunities that salmon seemed to be missing on the lower Columbia River and the lower Snake River as much as simply water velocity. Another example: in considering the geography of salmon populations, the scientists spent considerable time discussing the hypothesis that salmon lived in metapopulations, in which strong “core” populations in relatively productive and reliable habitat are interconnected with “satellite” populations through interbreeding. The satellite populations can exploit – or barely eek out a living in – surrounding habitat that is much more variable, and it is these satellite populations, the scientists suggested, that were often identified as needing the most help. But metapopulation theory suggested that protecting remote populations and habitat was not the right priority, or at least not the only priority. Remote isolated populations were far too vulnerable to natural disturbances and loss of genetic variation. Strong populations in centrally located habitat on the mainstem rivers or larger tributaries were perhaps even more important, as were the connections between those areas and the more remote tributaries (ISG 1996).

The implications were clear. The NWPCC’s Columbia Basin fish and wildlife program needed fundamental reworking. It should be guided by a broad scientific vision, and objectives that could support natural processes, functions and interconnections. Smaller-scale plans and individual funded projects should be coordinated with one another and the broad-scale objectives, in order to further these broad-scale processes, functions and interconnections. The 1996 Gorton amendment would provide one of the key mechanisms to make sure individual projects did this: from now on, all projects proposed for funding would be reviewed by a panel of independent scientists, and among other criteria, these scientists would measure the proposals against the broad-scale vision of a normative river.

Toward a Ecological Regionalist Approach: Subbasin Planning

By 2000, when I worked at the NWPCC helping to put together the new fish and wildlife program,²⁷ there was considerable hope that scientific review and a major reorganizational effort were bringing a much-needed coherence and accountability to the NWPCC's regional effort to "protect, mitigate and enhance" the Columbia Basin's salmon and other fish and wildlife. The 2000 fish and wildlife program set out from the outset to provide an ecosystem approach compatible with the independent scientists' recommendations. The NWPCC wrote:

Unlike past versions of the program, which were criticized by scientists for consisting primarily of a number of measures that called for specific actions without a clear, programwide foundation of scientific principles, this version of the program expresses goals and objectives for the entire basin based on a scientific foundation of ecological principles (Northwest Power Planning Council 2000, 9).

The "vision" for the NWPCC's program included "a Columbia River ecosystem that sustains an abundant, productive, and diverse community of fish and wildlife" (Northwest Power Planning Council 2000, 13). The NWPCC specifically adopted seven guiding scientific principles that embodied the independent scientists' emphasis on dynamic ecosystems, varied environmental processes, and species diversity (Northwest Power Planning Council 2000, 15).²⁸ "Wherever feasible," the program would be "accomplished by protecting and restoring the natural ecological functions, habitats, and

27. I worked in the legal division, reviewing recommendations for amendments and cull the essential points, to help prepare the way for the "findings" that would state – in the same document, as required by the 1994 court decision – why the NWPCC had adopted or not adopted them.

28. Scientific Principles of the Northwest Power Planning Council's 2000 Fish and Wildlife Program (Northwest Power Planning Council 2000: 15):

- a) The abundance, productivity and diversity of organisms are integrally linked to the characteristics of their ecosystems.
- b) Ecosystems are dynamic, resilient and develop over time.
- c) Biological systems operate on various spatial and time scales that can be organized hierarchically.
- d) Habitats develop, and are maintained, by physical and biological processes.
- e) Species play key roles in developing and maintaining ecological conditions.
- f) Biological diversity allows ecosystems to persist in the face of environmental variation.
- g) Ecological management is adaptive and experimental.
- h) Ecosystem function, habitat structure and biological performance are affected by human actions.

biological diversity of the Columbia River Basin” (Northwest Power Planning Council 2000, 13).

The flagship effort was a new “subbasin planning” process. The Columbia Basin was divided into some sixteen “provinces,” and these into some sixty subbasins (Map 6.4). Fish and wildlife planning would now be divided geographically, with each geographic scale linked to broader-scale objectives and strategies. Slightly more than a decade after the previous aborted subbasin planning effort, this time subbasin planning aimed to adopt the independent scientists’ principles of emphasizing process and function, not simply production of fish. It would also require both broad-level scientific review of the program as a whole, and scientific review of all proposed projects.²⁹

The idea of subbasin planning was that it would provide a solid understanding of ecological conditions and goals around the large Columbia Basin that could articulate both up and down in scale. Subbasin plans would be developed to meet the broader-scale objectives and strategies, but in a way that was compatible with local conditions. Additionally, once subbasin plans were completed, proposed projects would be reviewed according to their compatibility with the subbasin plans.

The importance of local specificity, knowledge and involvement were stressed repeatedly. Subbasin planning would bring to light specialized local knowledge and needs, allow for participation of varied “stakeholders,” and produce a basin program sensitive to local ecological and social variation. This fit with a broad trend in the Pacific Northwest and elsewhere toward reorganizing natural resource governance by empowering “local” multi-stakeholder groups as resource managers. Collectively subbasin planning groups around the basin could provide an assessment and set of project proposals that might direct a well-thought-out, integrated basin-wide fish and wildlife program.

29. This was provided by two different but overlapping groups of independent scientists. The first was to provide broad-level conceptual review of the program and key scientific questions. This was the group that had put together the 1996 *Return to the River* report (of which a final draft was issued in 2000), and was renamed the Independent Scientific Advisory Board (ISAB). A second group provided detailed review of individual proposed projects; this was the Independent Scientific Review Panel (ISRP).

In short, though the NWPCC had backed away from controversy on the mainstem river, it now proposed to undertake a very comprehensive, very regionalist, scientifically system-oriented approach to fish and wildlife throughout the basin. It had much to offer this effort: an agency and a huge set of cooperating biologists, federal, state, tribal and local officials, landowners, fishermen, businessmen and others who might actually have the money, will and authority to turn a regionalist vision into both regional-level understanding and policy, and wide on-the-ground change, for the wide benefit of people and ecosystems alike. In the summer of 2007, when I set out to interview people about subbasin planning, my questions were whether subbasin planning had achieved the old and new regionalist goals of (1) bringing regional coherence, organization and purpose to the NWPCC's fish and wildlife program, (2) incorporating diverse and dispersed people's participation and needs, and finally, (3) incorporating diverse physical and ecological processes, functions and connections, and meeting diverse species' needs.

Successes and Limitations to Regionalism in the NWPCC's Subbasin Planning, 2000-2007

To make subbasin planning work, the NWPCC devoted huge amounts of money and staff time to organize, manage and provide support for subbasin planners. It had one person of the central staff dedicated each to administrative, scientific and legal support. It set up a middle level of administration organized by individual state or "ecological province" headed up by state or tribal agency personnel. These helped get local interests together into a group and appoint a leader. The Council provided a technical guide for how to organize the preparation of the plan, but tried to leave as much flexible as possible in terms of the choice of analytical tools and the specific organization of each plan. Subbasin planning groups could contract out for the work of putting together a plan, or they could do it themselves. Either way, though, they signed a contract to deliver a plan by a specific date, and understood that the plan would be reviewed by the NWPCC's Independent Scientific Review Board before adoption in the program. Their incentive was that a plan that passed muster with the independent scientists would be adopted into

the NWPCC's fish and wildlife program, and be used to guide future project funding; and that NOAA Fisheries agreed to use subbasin plans as guides for its ESA recovery plans (Peter Paquet, interview, 2007). Here was an opportunity, then, for relatively local groups to develop the understanding of particular local needs and priorities, and to set the management framework for both future funding and regulatory restrictions.

The hard work of Council planners and staff, as well as of hundreds of people at the "province" and local levels, paid off when some sixty subbasin plans came in on time.³⁰ Passing the scientific review was more difficult – only a third of the plans were approved as close to meeting the scientific criteria set out by the Council. A second third of the plans needed significant work, and were sent back for revisions. For the most part, agreed scientists and Council staff, these subbasin plans had high-quality biological assessments but had done a poor job linking these to their management plans. Subbasin plans in this second group were modified and then reviewed by Council staff – although, as the leader of the Independent Scientific Review Board noted, they were not re-reviewed by the independent scientists – and then adopted into the fish and wildlife program. A third set of subbasin plans came in as grossly inadequate. Council staff worked hard with these subbasin groups, and in most cases, shepherded them through major revisions that brought their plans up to a level deemed adequate – though again, these revised plans were not re-reviewed by the independent scientists. Only a few never found their way to acceptance, and were rejected (Rick Williams 2007, phone conversation).³¹

I had sought to understand the successes and limitations in achieving three regionalist goals in the subbasin planning effort: (1) achieving regional coherence and purpose, (2) incorporating diverse participation and human needs, and (3) incorporating diverse ecological needs and processes. The greatest success in this first round of

30. Scientific coordinator Peter Paquet notes that there was a lot of pressure to relax the deadlines. There was one extension of the whole effort's completion date, but after that, the Council refused individual extensions.

31. The plans that were never brought up to adoptable quality and were rejected by the NWPCC were almost all in basins that traditionally received little funding from the Fish and Wildlife program, such as those in the upper Snake River.

subbasin planning seemed to be the first half of the second of these, getting wide participation from people throughout much of the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest. The scientific director for subbasin planning for the Council felt that this first round of subbasin planning was tremendously successful. There was tremendous buy-in from those involved in subbasin planning: participants felt empowered, successful and that they could genuinely influence broader funding and policy. This was essential, for it meant that these were plans that people would believe in and use.³² He thought the Council's approach of offering technical support and analytical tools, but allowing individual subbasin groups to choose whether or not to use them, was very effective (Peter Paquet, Interview, 2007).³³

This is not to say that participation or the consideration of human needs from the river system was completely inclusive. The participants in subbasin planning were "stakeholders" and people and organizations with interest in the effort – not a randomly selected group of the public (c.f. Vogel In preparation-a). Further, the groups were led by either state or tribal fish and wildlife managers, and so reflected their needs and interests first and foremost.

The goal I identified as part of the "new" regionalism – incorporating diverse ecological needs and processes – was achieved partially. Certainly many subbasin plans looked at many habitats, ecological and physical processes, and species; collectively they looked at a huge number. But many failed to link population goals with habitat process, and without this, the plans too easily settled on old approaches to boost hatchery production or actively restore in-stream habitat. There were only so many species and

32. His comparison was with the Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project – a wide assessment of the Columbia Basin east of the Cascade Mountains that was largely abandoned once completed. He said when a plan like that is done, the first thing people do when they see its maps is look in their own back yard – and if the local area they know does not match the generalization made at a broader scale, they dismiss the whole report. Subbasin planning allowed people to get in their own backyard knowledge and perceptions.

33. Most, he said, initially said they would do it their own way, but soon discovered it was far harder than they expected. Then they came asking for guidance to use the Council's "Ecosystem Diagnosis and Treatment" analysis method – but saw this as a resource and asset, rather than as an imposed mandate (Peter Paquet, Interview, 2007).

individuals these approaches could help, and many were not good ways to support long-term ecological diversity and viability.³⁴

The first goal I identified as regionalist, the goal of regional coherence and purpose, seemed the most elusive. The bigger questions that related to this goal were raised mainly after the subbasin plans were compiled. There were two central and related concerns: first, what did it add up to? Second, did it really change anything about the quality and over-all effectiveness of the projects that were funded? So far, the answers seemed to be “we don’t know” and no.³⁵

When the Council proposed to adopt the subbasin plans as amendments to the fish and wildlife program, it asked for public comment. Comments, said John Shurts, the NWPCC’s chief counsel, were a bit odd. Most people thought the subbasin plans were basically good. Sure, there were specific comments about people’s local plans. But many more of the comments asked what it all added up to. And at this point the Council could not really say. Instead it promised another round of amendments to look at the province or “ESU” level, to address what became known as the “rollup” question.

As for whether the subbasin planning process changed the over-all quality and effectiveness of the projects recommended for funding through the NWPCC’s program, the answer seemed to be: not much. The Independent Scientific Review Board was not asked to prioritize projects, only to evaluate their scientific validity. The good news was that there were far too many projects deemed scientifically valid for the program to recommend them all for funding. The bad news was that there were no clear criteria for which were the most important, so those decisions were made largely based on historical allocations. If this was true within subbasins, it was even more true between subbasins –

34. The scientific director of the subbasin planning effort, Peter Paquet, argued that although there were concerns raised by the independent scientific review, on the whole the subbasin plans earned as good marks from scientists as did plans put together by federal agencies – several of which had been roundly panned in recent years. The success and quality of the subbasin plans was evidenced, he said, by the fact that many are now being used by others who apply for other kinds of money for ecological restoration and other such efforts (Paquet 2007).

35. John Shurts says he thinks many expected something unrealistic of subbasin planning – that it could revolutionize the program right away. He thinks at least initially its purpose was more to provide a scientific “floor” to support what they were already doing.

where there was absolutely no guidance for prioritization (John Shurts, interview, 2007; Rick Williams, Interview, 2007).

Part of the problem lay in the way the 2000 Program was written, and the way subbasin planning was organized. Simply put, the emphasis on the “local” made “regional” more difficult. Biologically, the effort seemed to focus on the unique characteristics, needs and problems of individual subbasins rather than their connections with other places and broader spatial scales. Participants liked local control over their particular subbasins, but their control also sometimes meant intransigence. Few participants were willing to let go of projects they were committed to. Rick Williams, chair of the Independent Scientific Review Panel who participated in reviews of almost every subbasin, thought there should be some regional-level participants in every subbasin to help provide a broader perspective.

These limitations of the program as it has been written and implemented so far are, at least in theory, correctable. The NWPCC will begin a new round of amendments to the fish and wildlife program in November 2007, and this time will be looking for recommendations on “rollup” – how to get the individual subbasin plans to add up to something that can really help populations at a larger scale. This was actually supposed to happen earlier, and has been delayed in part because of a lack of enthusiasm from the Council – many of whose constituents, after all, have enjoyed the local approach – and partly because of the ongoing ESA litigation. But the organization and completion of subbasin plans was a massive effort, and the NWPCC deserves considerable sympathy for its notion that Columbia Basin wide fish and wildlife planning can be further coordinated and improved from here.

The problems are not all easily remedied though. Part of the problem is technical and biological. The factors that influence salmon through their life cycle – or, from an even longer term perspective, their multi-generational processes of movement, reproduction, and evolution – are many and complex. Even to try to understand all the things in a single reach of a river that affect salmon is impossible, but there one may at least come to understand some of the major factors and how they play out at different

spatial and temporal scales. Aggregate knowledge of many reaches into a small watershed and then a whole subbasin, and the variables and their relationships become that much more complex, uncertain and difficult to manage. Keeping track and taking account of these interconnections is not unlike the problem faced by the PNWRPC – to try to do a truly comprehensive all-inclusive plan was simply beyond the capabilities of a few dozen, even several hundred, human beings.³⁶

Part of the problem remains structural and political. Though the *Return to the River* report, the 2000 fish and wildlife program, and subbasin planning have offered a way to use scientific insight to organize a broadly regional and in some ways regionalist assessment and planning effort, there is still only so much the NWPC and the state, federal and tribal fish and wildlife managers can do or will do. As legal counsel John Shurts noted, there is simply a huge gap between the levels of actual and desired salmon abundance in many of the subbasins, and it is not at all clear that gap can be jumped.

There is a further impediment to regional coherence and purpose that has grown over time, especially over the last seven years, but perhaps going back as far as the early death of the contentious 1994 Program. The four states of the NWPC, and the tribes with whom they work closely in developing the fish and wildlife program, have fragmented. The NWPC no longer has the fresh air of an experiment, the enthusiasm of people who think they can provide revolutionary but pragmatic solutions to collective problems. The central staff still believes the agency has something to offer as a regional body, but the governor-appointed members are increasingly interested mainly in protecting their own. This, at the moment, means far more attention on backroom deals in the ESA litigation than on collaborating for a real collective vision.

This does not mean that there is no hope for the NWPC's program. Though no longer making headline news, and not able to be the revolutionary force it was once hoped to be, the NWPC's fish and wildlife program seems to be slowly, deliberately,

36. The NWPC does have a major advantage in organizing huge volumes of data over its PNWRPC predecessors: computers. Using sophisticated computer modeling, the NWPC developed an assessment tool that allows the use of expert best guesses in the place of clear data, and also allows this to be refined over time.

moving toward a truly regionally encompassing perspective in a way few other aspects of fish or power management are.

Endangered Species Act: The Regional Politics of Federal Law

The wars within the three-and-a-half-state Pacific Northwest are perhaps nowhere as nasty as around Endangered Species Act decision making. Since the early 1990s, many more “evolutionarily significant units” of salmon have been listed under the Endangered Species Act. In 2000, NOAA Fisheries³⁷ developed a Biological Opinion concerning the operation of the Federal Columbia River Power System, and with it, a comprehensive recovery plan. Since that time, the Biological Opinion and NOAA Fisheries have been in litigation in federal court almost continually. The 2000 Biological Opinion was rejected by the court, rewritten completely in 2004, and then that plan was rejected as well. As I write a new revised Biological Opinion is on its way, due on October 31, 2007; a proposed plan for a huge set of projects to meet the ESA requirements has just been released by the “action agencies” that run the Federal Columbia River Power System – the BPA, the Army Corps of Engineers, and the Bureau of Reclamation. Their plan hearkens back considerably to the 2000 Biological Opinion but aims to provide both more certainty and more accommodation to litigants’ concerns.

The ongoing litigation over the FCRPS BiOp has driven wedges between the states, and created contending factions of tribes and states. Almost everyone I talked to agreed: litigation has spawned general mistrust and backroom deal-making, rather than unified collective regional planning for shared benefit.

And yet, it should not be missed that the participants in the wars reaffirm the region. The Endangered Species Act has the reputation of an absolute, inflexible law whose rules and requirements get imposed by a distant federal government against the will of states and local governments. But in the Columbia River basin, the four states of

37. NOAA is the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and is part of the Department of Commerce. NOAA Fisheries was formerly known as the National Marine Fisheries Service. NOAA Fisheries is responsible under the Endangered Species Act for marine species, while US Fish and Wildlife (Department of Interior) is responsible for terrestrial and freshwater species. Salmon, as species that traverse this boundary, had to be assigned to one responsible agency, and were assigned to NOAA Fisheries.

the NWPCC and the thirteen tribes of the Columbia Basin have been important players in the development of Biological Opinions. They are participants in formal consultations with NOAA Fisheries and the “action agencies” that operate the Federal Columbia River Power System.³⁸ And as lawsuit after lawsuit has begun to suggest that NOAA Fisheries and the action agencies cannot (or will not) come up with a plan that will pass muster with the judge who has decided all the lawsuits since 2000, BPA has been running around meeting with managers and lawyers from the states and tribes, offering them something – most likely, assured project funding for particular projects – in return for promises not to litigate.³⁹

There are of course tremendous ironies in this. The ESA is supposed to provide a kind of scientific objectivity that politics cannot provide. The NWPCC, an openly political institution, though, has now imposed systematic scientific review at almost every step of its program process. Combined with funding caps, this has imposed a certain discipline and growing coherence on the NWPCC’s program. In contrast, the ESA has grown more political – and turned to pork barrel funding of Columbia River fish and wildlife projects, precisely what scientific review of the Council’s program was designed to overcome.

38. Federal agencies’ consultation with the states and tribes – the other “sovereigns” – grew in large part from the directive from the courts, but it derives from the Northwest Power Act. Court direction for the federal agencies in ESA decision making to incorporate or collaborate with the tribes and the states came first in the 1994 ESA decision (rejecting the 1993 “no jeopardy” Biological Opinion), and has been reiterated and strengthened in the recent series of decisions and directives. Though the litigation has been based on the Endangered Species Act, the directive to consult with the states and the tribes seems to come out of the Northwest Power Act. This highlights the ways these laws – and the ESA and the NWPCC fish and wildlife program – have become entangled. The measures mandated by the Biological Opinions have been funded by the BPA, but BPA’s legal authority and responsibility to pay for fish and wildlife compensation in the Columbia Basin comes from the Northwest Power Act. And it is the NWPCC – a four-state agency which must follow the recommendations of tribes as well as states’ fish and wildlife agencies – whose program the BPA must act consistent with. This has created two possible routes to mesh the two laws and their programs. The first is to have the NWPCC make its program correspond to ESA directives. It has done this to a considerable extent, despite the fact that its responsibilities are broader, and the ESA’s focus on weak stocks arguably runs counter to the NWPCC’s independent scientists’ call to prioritize core populations within metapopulations. The second strategy is for the agencies that develop the Biological Opinion to work directly with the states and tribes, making sure their desired projects and programs are put into the Biological Opinion. This has become an integral part of the development of Biological Opinions in the Columbia Basin.

39. Others can and do litigate, including environmental groups, but the lawsuits are much stronger with states or tribes on board; and the courts also defer to them far more. They are also the managers who have a clear legal claim on prioritizing BPA funding. Thus the deal-making

In addition to the participation of the states and the tribes, the role of the BPA must be highlighted here too. Although legally NOAA Fisheries is the federal agency responsible for protecting endangered and threatened Columbia River salmon, the regional BPA is the leading architect as well as deal-maker in hammering out the soon-to-be-released 2007 Biological Opinion (Stier, Shurts).⁴⁰ It is clear that nothing will move forward without the agreement of the BPA; the BPA not only has tremendous political power in the Pacific Northwest, it is the source of the funds that are being allocated in these deals. The BPA, for its part, while taking seriously its legal responsibilities for fish and wildlife, remains fundamentally committed to its power customers and to the support from its congressional delegation, which continues almost universally to value inexpensive federal Columbia River power as essential to regional well-being.

Salmon advocates have for over a decade focused on ESA decision making and litigation as the strategy to achieve major changes to dams on the river. The last seven years suggest, however, that this strategy has only made the BPA, the federal agencies that own Columbia River dams, regional power customers, and the Pacific Northwest congressional delegation, become more intransigent – and that these collectively can prevail, though they may have to buy off at considerable expense those salmon advocates who work for Columbia Basin states or tribes. It is possible that the election of a new President in 2008 and a Democratic Congress may enable *national*-scale political pressure – something environmentalists, states and tribes all have long experience tapping – to undercut the ability of this regional BPA-centered alliance to resist fundamental change. However, it may be that a more successful strategy could be found working within rather than against the regional politics of the regional power system. Essentially, this would mean making sure that any fundamental changes to the river's dams, such as breaching dams or drawing down reservoirs, did not raise BPA rates or threaten the BPA and its regional preference policy. Somehow, a regional coalition across fish and power interests in the region would need to talk the national Congress into paying for such

40. The other action agencies – the Army Corps and the Bureau of Reclamation – have also of course played a role. It is worth noting that the NOAA Fisheries regional director since 2001 has been Bob Lohn, former fish and wildlife director for the NWPCC, and before that, counsel for the BPA.

changes – while getting that same national Congress to continue guaranteeing exclusive regional benefits for the Pacific Northwest from Columbia River power. While this seems difficult, experience suggests this may be easier than breaking the region's effective veto on any legislation, Biological Opinion, or court ruling that would threaten too deeply the region's benefits from BPA and federal Columbia River power.

This strategy, however, has yet to be advanced in any large-scale way. In the meantime the bickering and deal-making over ESA planning and litigation continue.

What is perhaps most interesting of all is that the opportunity to ally with a clear regional power coalition may be fading, as the regional power system itself is threatening to disintegrate.

POWER: THE BREAKUP OF THE COLUMBIA RIVER'S PACIFIC NORTHWEST?

A central insight that has come out of my effort to understand the limits to and possibilities for regionalism in the Columbia Basin is that, although in the current era fish and wildlife planning is the most visibly regionalist effort, what holds the Columbia River-centered Pacific Northwest together is not primarily the connections of hydrology and ecology. It is connections of transmission lines and shared cheap electric rates, and the single agency that delivers cheap power throughout the region. In the last twenty years or so, it has also been the money that comes from power sales that pays for fish and wildlife.

If it is BPA's electric power and money ultimately that hold the region together, then in some ways the most sobering development in regards to regionalist potential today in the Columbia River-centered Pacific Northwest come not from the fragmentation of ESA litigation, but the fragmentation of BPA power and the customers and places it serves. Fragmentation of the regional power system suggests a possible break-down of the entire regional structure, and loss of motivation to maintain any remaining cohesion.

On the other hand, given that “the region” in terms of the Columbia River has since the New Deal meant a three-and-a-half-state area whose fundamental connection and primary shared interest is electric power, it is also hard not to hope that breaking this down might provide some openings for other interests, other ideas and organization of region, other priorities, to come in.

There are two major developments in the politics of BPA power in recent years that threaten to de-regionalize the entire BPA-centered Pacific Northwest power system. Because both suggest such fundamental change to the regional power system, they have become entwined. An initial accord is likely to be hammered out over the next months but it is unclear how things will settle in the long run.

Residential Exchange: The Return of the Public-versus-Private-Power Divide

A key political necessity in building the Northwest Power Act was finding a way to make sure the private utilities – and their many customers, who were also constituents of federal legislators, most notably in the state of Oregon – benefited from the regional power system. The means that was settled upon was the “residential exchange.”⁴¹ The rationale was that the Bonneville Project Act emphasized that the purposes of federal power were especially to provide for residential and rural customers, and this should be just as important as public preference. The Northwest Power Act called for private utilities with average system costs higher than BPA’s to be able to exchange power with BPA: the private utilities would buy enough BPA power to provide for their residential and small farm customers – thus obtaining the benefits of cheap federal power for these private utility customers – and BPA would buy the same amount of power back. In practice, what has happened is there has been no exchange of power, but simply an exchange of money: the BPA has paid the private utilities the difference between their average system costs.

41. This section was built largely from interviews with John Shurts, NWPCC, John Harrison, NWPCC, and Steve Weiss, Northwest Energy Coalition, all in 2007, and from legal analyses by John Shurts.

There were several difficulties with this basic idea, though. One is that calculating “average system cost” turns out to be a complicated and sometimes contested practice. Even more important is the fact that this BPA payment to private utilities had to come from somewhere. In the politics of the Northwest Power Act deliberations, this somewhere could not be from the public utilities. The act included a very complicated provision that everyone I interviewed said is hard to interpret precisely, but basically says that publics could not end up paying more for their power than they would have done had the Northwest Power Act not been passed. Among the specifications was a provision that the publics could not pay more to support the residential exchange if this had the effect of raising their rates higher than they would have been absent the Northwest Power Act. BPA had only three major sets of customers, and if group B, the privates, could not be paid out of the prices charged to group A, the publics, the money had to come from group C, the DSIs. This is what happened for many years – and the DSIs signed on to it, in exchange for long-term contracts. The problem is that in the last ten years or so, the DSIs have largely shut down or left the region.

With the departure of the DSIs, there was no clear funding source for the residential exchange other than public utilities’ rates. Because of the perceived difficulties in implementing the residential exchange provisions of the Northwest Power Act, the BPA and private utilities entered into settlement agreements, in which BPA promised to pay a certain amount of money and the utilities agreed not to put the agency through the cumbersome effort of precisely following the Power Act’s residential exchange provisions. As a result, in 2000 the BPA spread money more widely and generously out to private utilities than might have been provided with a strict calculation of average system costs. Then, it raised the rates for public utilities for 2002-2006. A group of public utilities sued the BPA, saying it did not have the authority to settle the residential exchange in a way that was not consistent with the Northwest Power Act. The Ninth Circuit agreed, invalidating the settlement agreements. BPA then felt obligated by the court order to stop the residential exchange, and to go back and try to figure out the payments to private utilities under the complicated guidelines in the Northwest Power

Act (Shurts, email analyses and communication, 2007). Private utilities prices were slated to go up by ten percent or more almost immediately. Private utilities, customer groups, and Oregon legislators immediately sent letters and emails and posted ads and op-eds expressing outrage, demanding legislative action. The BPA tried to calm tempers, assuring everyone the problem would be solved; but there was no obvious immediate solution. Where could the money come from? Steve Weiss of the Northwest Energy Coalition (phone interview, 2007) suggested the Northwest Power Act gives the Administrator quite a bit of discretion in interpreting this portion of the law, so that a solution could be found that would be accepted by the courts. While ultimately it might result in a slight rate hike to the publics, the publics would be hard pressed to prove their costs had gone up over all, given all the other things the Northwest Power Act had done for them. But perhaps part of the problem was still simply political. Close adherence to the Northwest Power Act formula, using accepted means of calculating average system costs, would provide relatively little money to the private utilities. Idaho Power, for example, would probably get nothing – because its power comes from hydropower dams, its costs are low. Payments might not have to end, but they would have to become less generous in order to abide by the law. It is not clear that either the private utilities or the congress members that represent people in the private utilities' service territories will accept such a meager residential exchange (Sickinger 2007).

The impasse threatens to unravel the entire political agreement and structure that made the Northwest Power Act possible – and it was the Northwest Power Act, of course, which a quarter of a century ago enabled the continuance of the BPA-centered regional power system. Even the public utilities realize they are playing with fire; for if Oregon and Idaho legislators decide that BPA has little to offer them, the unity in the Pacific Northwest congressional delegation that protects the BPA from the rest of Congress goes away. Times have changed from earlier eras of unified regional support for the BPA and the Federal Columbia River Power System – or perhaps they have not: without appeasing the private utilities, there may be no federal power and no Columbia River-centered region in the Pacific Northwest.

Rumors in summer 2007 were that private and public utilities and the BPA were in closed-door meetings and fairly close to an agreement – and an early agreement – though no details was recently announced (Sickinger 2007). Some seemed to think a solution could be found within the existing legal framework; others seemed to think that, another almost third of a century after the Northwest Power Act, more than two-thirds of a century after the Bonneville Project Act, another revamping of the role of federal power in the region will be necessary.

What is interesting, perhaps, is how the threat of total destabilization and fragmentation has brought parties together into intense regional negotiations. Even rival siblings recognize there is reason to stay together if it protects everyone’s inheritance. The catch is that at the moment, it is not clear what the solution is. And the conventional wisdom seems to be that if the residential exchange dilemma is not solved, what remains at the core of the Columbia River’s Pacific Northwest, its regional power system, is gone.

Regional Dialogue: Individualizing a Collective Resource ⁴²

The residential exchange litigation and negotiations have played out over a backdrop in which all utilities in the region have been in active negotiations for several years trying to find a way to protect their benefits from the Federal Columbia River Power System, while also winning greater control and freedom in their own investment decisions, and reducing the role of the BPA. This delicate balance is being pursued in a series of conversations and proposals known as the “regional dialogue” over the future role of the Bonneville Power Administration in power supply. The basic proposal at the heart of the regional dialogue is widely though not universally accepted. It would carve up the firm power⁴³ provided by the Federal Columbia River Power System into percentages, allocated according to utilities’ current shares. If they wanted more power

42. This section also was built largely from interviews with John Shurts, NWPC John Harrison, NWPC, and Steve Weiss, Northwest Energy Coalition, and from legal analyses by John Shurts – as well as my own experience working at the NWPC following the 2001 West Coast energy crisis.

43. Firm power is the power that can be produced even in a low water year; it is essentially guaranteed to buyers.

after that, they would either have to purchase it themselves, or else pay a higher cost for the additional power – the marginal cost of the new power.

Once again, the ironies are considerable. For the decades from the 1940s to the 1970s, one of the biggest fights undertaken by BPA customers – especially its preference customers, the publics – was to win authorization for BPA to build or purchase generation facilities. This fight was finally won with the 1980 Northwest Power Act. But since that time, enthusiasm has eroded. Confidence in BPA's ability to finance new generation disintegrated after the collapse of the Washington Public Power Supply System's nuclear program (see Chapter Five, Pope 2008). For a while, there was faith in BPA's ability to provide through the market instead. In the 1990s, electric power markets had been liberalized in the wide push for deregulation and market openness. For the first time in almost a century, power-producing plants could be built and operate in the U.S. that were not tied to utilities with specific territories or customers. Independent power producers began to open up throughout the country, selling their power to utilities and wholesale power marketing entities like the BPA. In addition, the Energy Policy Act of 1992 mandated that transmission lines become "common carrier" lines, transmitting the power from any utility to their customers. Together, these meant the opening of a "spot market" in power, in which electric power could be bought from any location in an interconnected transmission grid system by the highest bidder. The Pacific Northwest grid had long been interconnected with wider transmission systems, and by the 1990s was part of an interconnected high-voltage system that ran from British Columbia in the north to northern Mexico in the south, and from the west coast to Nebraska. In an era of high optimism about the ability of the free market to lower costs, the BPA chose to trust the new free market to provide. By the late 1990s, it had set itself up to need to buy a large amount of power – enough to power the city of Seattle – in a low water year. Then, in the winter of 2000-2001, an almost record low water year in the Columbia River coincided with a tight (and, as it turns out, manipulated) power supply in California. Prices spiked, and in a single season, BPA spent over a billion dollars buying power to meet its load. It did everything it could to reduce its needs – it shut down spill for fish in the name of a

power emergency, paid aluminum companies not to operate, and bought their power back from them at inflated prices; and provided incentives for irrigators to shut down operations so as not to use their pumps. (See also Chapter One.) But the financial hit – though not nearly as bad as that faced by California utilities and customers – was considerable. BPA customers' prices went up by close to fifty percent.

After it was all over, BPA's customers and Pacific Northwest legislators had renewed enthusiasm for the benefits of Columbia River power: a stable, low-cost source, which while variable year to year, could be relied upon even in a low water year to produce large volumes of power. They had lost enthusiasm, though, for trusting BPA to acquire or sell any power generation beyond its existing power supply.

As a result, in the years since the 2001 energy crisis, BPA utilities have tried to find ways to carve up the federal Columbia River Power System into reliable chunks they could have control over. In a sense, as Steve Weiss of the Northwest Energy Coalition insightfully observed, it is a proposal to privatize the Columbia River's power without actually privatizing it. It would make certain quantities of federal power effectively the property of individual utilities, and give them the right and responsibility to decide how to use power sales for any further investments in expansion. The utilities almost all seem to like the idea, both because they wish to avoid a recurrence of the kind of collective disaster seen in the Washington Public Power Supply's nuclear debacle and the 2001 West Coast energy crisis, and because it gives them a sense of freedom and control. Weiss thinks they are too dismissive of what they have to lose: BPA has far more market power as a collective entity than they will have as individual utilities, and thus greater ability to win lower prices from independent producers and out-of-region utilities; and as a regional system, it can buffer financial disasters in a way they cannot do individually.⁴⁴ But collective disasters seem harder to accept than individual ones, especially in an era of free-market ideological ascendance. The regional dialogue moves forward.

44. He notes that utilities that chose to cut loose from the BPA system earlier, such as Clark County PUD in Vancouver, Washington, often ended up with even higher spikes in power prices than did BPA customers.

There are still thorny issues to work out, however. Three key issues are: (1) how to structure the system so the hollowed-out BPA still pays for its public obligations to fish and wildlife and energy conservation, (2) how to limit access to potential new customers, and (3) how to structure rates.

The basic solution to the problem of making sure a hollowed-out BPA and a divvied-up Federal Columbia River Power System meet the BPA's public obligations is to divvy these up proportionately along with the power. The concern for advocates of fish and wildlife and conservation is as much political and financial. If every utility in the region sees an individualized line item in its bill to cover fish and wildlife and conservation costs, and if they come to see themselves as the masters of their own finances, there may be even more clamor from them – and their congressional representatives – to reduce these costs.

Why must BPA limit access to potential new customers? The BPA must sell power to any “preference” customer – any public or cooperative utility in its service region – that requests it. If local areas now served by private utilities in BPA's service region form public or cooperative utilities, they will instantly become preference customers, with a customer load BPA must supply. Divvying up all of BPA's firm power would mean either that there was no more power to sell should a new “preference customer” form, or else that the pool would have to be spread even more thinly. Both private utilities and public utilities that currently get BPA power prefer the first choice, and thus hope to find a way to keep out newcomers from the pool. But there are a couple difficulties with this. First, it is illegal under the current system and would require a congressional fix – something that is politically difficult and potentially hazardous. Second, the potential for new publics to carve out territory from private utilities has been a boon to customers of private utilities. It is this decades-long threat that has forced private utilities in the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest to keep their rates competitively low. Though Portland, Oregon and Idaho have usually remained very loyal to their private utilities, this alliance between private utilities and government officials might break up if a system were in place that took the threat of government takeover

away, thus allowing privates to jack up prices without fear. It could also, like the loss of the regional exchange program, threaten to end the cooperation of Oregon and Idaho senators with doing anything to protect the BPA at all. And while the regional dialogue hopes to carve up the BPA, it still relies on the existence of something to carve up.

The third key issue is how to structure cost fairly, while also addressing these concerns? One clear principle is that if current BPA customers want to buy *more* power from the BPA, that power must come from a different cost basis, reflective of BPA's marginal costs for that additional allotment. This is a principle most can agree on, for it protects current customers' existing power supplies, but also provides an incentive for conservation. There are, however, still concerns. Should there be any consideration for small utilities that are BPA "requirements" customers – that is, that get *all* their power from the BPA? Many have little infrastructure, expertise, or financial reserve to manage their own generation growth instead of relying on BPA. These could face large cost burdens for BPA load growth, even though a large percentage of growth for them would not be a high percentage of the BPA system. Also: can cost structure solve the difficulties of how to discourage potential new BPA customers, if they cannot be legally excluded? Can it be used to find a way through the impasse over the regional exchange? There is hope that it may, but finding a way to achieve it legally and politically is a difficult task.

The interruption of the regional exchange program has added urgency to the regional dialogue. In October and November, BPA is hosting a packed series of workshops addressing issues related to the regional dialogue (BPA 2007). Again, the sense of looming disaster is bringing people together to try to hash out a solution, but it is not entirely clear what that will be.

Whither a de-regionalized region?

Some find reason to hope that if the regional power system collapses or disintegrates into atomized parts, that there will be greater hope for salmon, as well as wise energy planning. Recognizing that the BPA is at the core of the regional "establishment" that protects dams and hydropower above all, they hope that if the

“institutional rot and inertia” is swept away, that there may finally be a political opening for radical measures that can prioritize energy conservation and salmon rather than electric production and consumption (Ed Chaney, quoted in Barker and Larmer 2001).

The risks, however, are great – which is why even environmental groups have often been reluctant to attack BPA too directly or strongly.⁴⁵ If the regional dialogue goes forward, there may be increased political pressure to lower investments in fish and wildlife and power conservation. The fragmentation that has threatened among the four states of the Columbia River’s Pacific Northwest since the residential exchange came under attack has compounded the existing tensions and infighting that have come out of the ESA litigation. Inter-state rivalries and mistrust impede the NWPCC’s work – and for all its failures, the NWPCC does a considerable amount of good work, including the slow movement toward a coherent basin-wide fish and wildlife program, and a highly respected power planning program. Finally, the loss of a regional system would threaten what has been the single clear wide benefit provided by the Columbia River to its Pacific Northwest: cheap, reliable electric power. In an atomized system, there is considerable likelihood that prices will go up, and investments in transmission and other infrastructure that support power reliability will go down.

Even if the regional dialogue goes forward and the residential exchange program crumbles, it is unlikely that either the BPA or the NWPCC will be instantly dissolved by Congress. But their purpose would become less clear, and likely further far more simple utilitarian goals rather than regionalist visions.⁴⁶

CONCLUSION

Does the ongoing practice of the Columbia River’s Pacific Northwest, and regional organization of river management, bring about wide participation and broad

45. They made an exception in the 2000 fight to incorporate a call for breaching the lower Snake River dams into the 2000 Biological Opinion. I briefly review this in (Vogel 2008a).

46. This might be reminiscent of the choice the NRC made after 1936 to use regional planning groups only as field offices for designated projects, rather than for grass-roots region-building.

social and environmental benefits? Yes and no. In the affirmative, the ongoing ideas and practice of the Columbia River-centered Pacific Northwest region bring together the representatives and interests from federal agencies, four states, Native American tribes, urban and rural residents, industries and the environment, to plan for collective social and environmental benefits – including reliable and affordable electric power for all, energy conservation, and ecosystem restoration. This coordination, participation, and orientation toward broad social and environmental goals are the central principles and shape the practice of the Northwest Power and Conservation Council, and they are found in many other regional institutions as well. From a more critical perspective, though, both participation and benefits are often organized in convoluted ways with uneven benefits. In practice, ongoing practice of the Columbia River-centered Pacific Northwest – by the NWPCC and others – often provides pork-barrel proceeds to vested interests while obstructing wiser, longer-term and more inclusive approaches to river ecosystem restoration, electric power, and social benefit. Regional practice remains limited and constrained as well by the region's particular geography, and the fact that it was institutionalized most fundamentally around the wide provision of inexpensive power.

As central to the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest today as its vision of regionalism are its fractures. These fractures are in many ways are inheritances from those fractures that were present at the very inception of the region and limited the ability to build a coherent unified region decades ago (Chapter III): jealousies between Washington and Oregon, Seattle and Portland, urban and rural areas, public and private power; and suspicion and defensiveness from upriver states and upriver areas of any policies and programs that make claims on their water or seem to prioritize lower-river needs.

While internal fractures have been reproduced, external pressures have multiplied. The American and even global ideological and political mood in relation to political economy has almost fully reversed since the New Deal, and has pushed market connections that know virtually no spatial boundaries. Environmental concerns have highlighted the unique character and bounty of Columbia River salmon – but broader law

and political mobilization have made these salmon into a national and even international cause, while Columbia River salmon themselves range north to Alaskan waters, sometimes straying into and from other river basins to breed. Global-scale changes of ocean ecological shifts and climate change may have as much effect on salmon as anything that can be done within the basin.

Together, internal fractures and external pressures make regionalism in the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest today difficult at best. And yet, regionalism is not dead in the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest, nor are its benefits.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION: HISTORIC AND FUTURE POSSIBILITIES

FOR REGIONALISM IN THE COLUMBIA RIVER'S

PACIFIC NORTHWEST AND BEYOND

INTRODUCTION

In the introductory chapter of this dissertation, I suggested that the history of the relationship between the Pacific Northwest region and the Columbia River offered a much-needed long-term case study in regional river system governance. By uncovering and analyzing the long history of regional management of the Columbia River, I sought to illuminate the actual, rather than hoped-for, abilities of regional river governance and management to meet wide social and ecological needs. In this chapter, the dissertation's conclusion, I aim to pull out some over-arching lessons. To organize this effort, I return to the four broad goals I set out in Chapter One:

- 1) To shed light on Columbia River politics today, by uncovering the too-often invisible structures and assumptions embedded within "regional" organization of river policymaking and management – in other words, to reveal what is invoked, when people make "the region" the proper grouping for analysis, discussion and collaboration of river or salmon management; and to consider how understanding this might open up political possibility.
- 2) To historicize the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest as a "historical institution" – that is, as a specific region and region-river relationship conceived and institutionalized at a particular moment in time, and within which Columbia River policymaking and management have been organized ever since – and in doing so, to

reveal the values, goals, political relationships, and understandings about the region and the river that became embedded within.

- 3) To illuminate how, why, and in what specific ways the regionalism of the New Deal-era conception of the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest was narrowed and came to favor certain resources and interests; and also how and why regional institutions and practice retained regionalist threads such as wide regional participation, wide regional sharing of benefits, urban-rural balance, and shared stewardship of common environmental resources.
- 4) To appraise and analyze realistically the historic and future potential for regionally organized Columbia River management – and by extension, other regional resource management systems – to provide wide social benefits to help sustain a high quality of life for a diverse and inclusive range of people, and to support natural hydrological and ecological processes, salmon, and viable livelihoods based on the river's natural products.

Though I began my inquiry with an interest in politics today, my understanding of today's Columbia River politics now derives in part from my understanding of the history of the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest. Thus I start here with an overview of goal 2, historicizing the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest, and move from there to goal 3, understanding its evolution, narrowings, and broadenings. This then provides the backdrop for a fuller undertaking of goal 1, understanding regional river politics today and finding political openings. I end with goal 4, a discussion of the past, present and future potential of regionalism in the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest and elsewhere. After spending so long focused on one region and one river, in some ways it is this broader question that now interests me the most, and so I try to take this one the farthest.

THE COLUMBIA RIVER'S PACIFIC NORTHWEST AS A HISTORICAL INSTITUTION

The values, goals, political relationships, and understandings about the region and the river that were and are embedded within the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest trace quite precisely to specific historical moments. Here I distill these from this dissertation's chapters.

Conception

The core of our notion and practice of the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest is an inheritance from its original conception in 1935. Several key pieces derive from that time.

Geography

The Columbia River basin is a single physical unit (notably, often minus the portions of the basin that cross inconveniently into Wyoming, Utah, Nevada and Canada); the three and a half states of Washington, Oregon, Idaho and western Montana are a political, social and economic unit; the physical river basin and the three-and-a-half-state political, social and economic unit are linked and mutually constitutive as a single regional conception and practice.

Geographical content: The importance of Puget Sound and U.S. federal geography

The Columbia River's Pacific Northwest was only one among several possible regionalizations with which its New Deal crafters planners grappled. Its specific geography mattered and still matters. It does not include fisheries or hydrological connections that extend out into the ocean, nor does it connect across the international border. The region *does* include Puget Sound, which has meant from the beginning that a large portion of the conceptual, political and economic influence in the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest has come from an area with little direct contact with or interest in the physical river itself. The state-based boundaries of the region, other than in Montana, mark a clear nod to the basic political organization of United States federalism; despite regional claims to a hydrologically centered identity that crosses state lines, this is a region fundamentally constituted by the conventional political boundaries, identities and powers of U.S. states and the U.S. nation.

Sense of naturalness, social and environmental beneficence, moral legitimacy

But because this regional geography claimed and still claims to be based on the natural Columbia River basin, it has a sense of naturalism and moral legitimacy that was not found in delineations of the Pacific Northwest as a three-state or four-state area. This legitimacy was tied by New Deal regional planners, too, to several assumptions about, and ideals for, the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest, many of which are still with us today. Most centrally, regional organization, particularly in relation to Columbia River management, is understood to be beneficial. It is thought to be rooted in wise and responsible long-range thinking and in intimate understandings about the region's needs. It is advanced as *the* appropriate geography in which to organize governance and participation in Columbia River resource management.

Internal tensions: Upstream areas versus a region centered on Oregon and Washington

Despite its claims of naturalness and beneficence, the conception of a unified Columbia River-centered Pacific Northwest has endured only with considerable tensions. Among these, many people have advanced the distinct rights or character of smaller-scale areas, tributary river basins, and state and local jurisdictions, against their incorporation into a single regional vision. Often it has been upriver areas and states that have contested regional notions crafted largely by people in Oregon and Washington – especially in Portland and Seattle. This tension is a deep-seated part of the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest.¹

Bonneville Project Act

Laws are particularly enduring historical institutions. When the conception of the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest was codified into the 1937 Bonneville Project Act, it was given the means to become a long-term part of the region's and the river's physical, cultural, economic and political landscape. It was also reduced, however. The Bonneville

1. Other regional conceptions would almost certainly have had the same structural problem of resistance from dissatisfied peoples claiming the rights and individuality of smaller-scale areas and jurisdictions, but the geographical axes of tension and polarization would have been different.

Project Act was missing numerous of pieces of the regional vision. Significant pieces were put in, though framed in particular ways. The Columbia River's Pacific Northwest has been shaped ever since by the potentialities, the priorities and the limits written into the Bonneville Project Act.

A singular focus on electric power

Regional planners had reduced even their initial legislative proposal to an agency that would deal only with transmitting and marketing power. The new agency would be strictly a power agency; no other function or Columbia River resource would be regionalized in the same way. For a time, Administrator Raver's BPA would stretch this limitation as far as it could with its market research program, but this effort was curtailed by the late 1940s.

Regional unevenness: Oregon and Washington first

The new agency not only was restricted to power, but was not fully regional. True, the expectation of a Columbia Basin-wide agency was written into the act; the context suggested a Columbia Basin-wide agency that would encompass Washington, Oregon, Idaho and western Montana; and step by step, by administrative action, executive order and new dam authorization bills, the agency did grow out close to its expected regional extent. Nonetheless, the vagueness of the region's geography in the BPA's organic act helped to make the region forever uneven. Those areas where BPA began, and which formed the corners of its triangular core regional grid – Portland and Bonneville Dam, Puget Sound, and Grand Coulee – would remain the core of the region. This difference was partly a product of upstream states' resistance to regional incorporation, but it would also compound this tension.

Regional unevenness: Public versus private power

At least as fragmenting was the Bonneville Project Act's provision for preference in power sales to public and cooperative utilities. This was supposed to be the measure that would ensure "power for the people" – all the people, that is – but this goal assumed

a wholesale takeover of Pacific Northwest private utilities' territories, city by city, county by county, that was never completed. The resulting differentiation between jurisdictions served by public and cooperative utilities versus those served by private utilities has been a fundamental rift in the region ever since. Sometimes it has compounded or been amplified by the upstream-downstream rift, as in Southern Idaho; sometimes it has threatened the downstream regional core, when Oregon legislators have threatened to abandon the BPA. The public-versus-private rift was calmed in the 1950s and 1960s by joint public-private investments (notably in the mid-Columbia PUD dams) and the Pacific Northwest Coordination Agreement, and again in the 1980s by the residential exchange program of the Northwest Power Act; but, as shown recently, it can emerge again when accords and deals break down.

Regional democracy through the regional congressional delegation

The Bonneville Project Act also left out any mention of regional planning, of state representation, or public participation, and in the process elevated federal legislators to the leading role in regional-scale democracy. The new BPA would be a regional agency, but its authorities came entirely from the federal government. Constituencies within the Pacific Northwest unhappy with the BPA would have to pressure it indirectly, through the Pacific Northwest congressional delegation. The federal senators and representatives of Washington and Oregon, and, to a lesser extent of Montana and Idaho, would become the powerful conduits of regional desires and concerns. Regional interests that could not induce action by federal legislators for a long time had little recourse.

Regional Institutionalization

Regionalism in practice: Power production and sales

As the new BPA went to work, it was able until 1943 to work with the Pacific Northwest Regional Planning Commission (PNWRPC), and until the early 1950s it worked closely with the former PNWRPC's Roy Bessey. But in the late New Deal era and during World War II, its regionalist aims narrowed to promoting power generation and sales, conducting research programs on possible sites for industry and recruiting

industry to the Pacific Northwest to take advantage of cheap Columbia River power. Particularly during the war, these strategies were enormously successful, and in the few short years between 1941 and 1945 the BPA successfully tied the region together with its transmission lines, inexpensive power, and success in recruiting new industry in many locations. After the war, when a more conservative Congress cut BPA's market research program, and failed to pass a CVA bill, what was left of this regionalist mission was the promotion of more and more power production and more and more power sales. This push would lead first to a largely successful drive to construct more and more dams throughout the river system, even into Canada, and then a not-so-successful drive to build nuclear power plants.

National and international geographical orientation

By the end of the Second World War, BPA had given the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest a new shared identity: a region that could win electricity-intensive industry from almost any other part of the country. This marked a fundamental shift in the geographical orientation of the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest. The region had been conceived as a region built and strengthened from within, through interconnected hydrology and trade. A key goal had been to strengthen these within-region interdependencies and interconnections, and to diversify the region as whole, to advance regional stability and bring the Pacific Northwest out of its colonial-like dependence on the East. But by the end of the Second World War regional identity and commonality were indelibly tied to the region's role within the larger spatial political and economic scales of nation and globe. The key was its ability to compete with other American (and occasionally non-American) regions in winning electricity-intensive industry. The region did industrialize somewhat, but it did not diversify all that much. It did not become independent of government or industry in the East, but it did gain greater clout.

The Postwar Re-ascendance of Private Business

By the end of the war, the regionalism of the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest was one in which wide social well being rested on economic growth fueled by federal

power's benefits to private enterprise and American defense. The re-ascendance of the private sector was heightened in the Eisenhower administration, and had several effects.

Regionalism through efficient economic coordination

With the ratification of the Columbia River Treaty and the concomitant signing of a thirty-year Pacific Northwest Coordination Agreement in 1964, river-wide and regional coordination meant coordination for efficient economic production. Water and power flows were tightly coordinated as if they belonged to a single utility.

Utilities become regional citizens

Ideals of participation had changed now, too: the federal government was no longer trusted to speak for all, and public and even private utilities were welcomed into river governance, and supported in their ambitions to build dams. The old ideal of regional democracy was seen as rejuvenated through the participation of business and non-federal jurisdictions.

Uneven regional obligation: Privatization helps the Snake River stay out

Yet despite this idea that regional democracy was renewed through the participation of private business, it has turned out that the dams built by private companies in this era, and the waters they control, have considerably less regional obligation than those dams built by the federal government and linked to the BPA grid. The federal government built the major dams in the tributaries of western Montana, and they became part of the BPA system. In the middle Snake in Idaho, the private Idaho Power Company built its Hells Canyon complex, and together with its irrigation and state political allies, kept BPA power out of southern Idaho. Though the federal dams of southern Idaho came to be considered part of the Federal Columbia River Power System, they were never integrated into the central BPA grid. Today, federal Columbia River salmon management calls far more readily on Montana's water than on Idaho's. The Idahoans' old fears were proven partly right: a regional Columbia River management system that included Idaho would enable the lower river states to make claims on the

state's waters. The participation of private business forestalled for the state the worst of this calamity.

The Pacific Northwest Power Planning and Conservation Act (Northwest Power Act)

The Columbia River's Pacific Northwest was transformed most dramatically in the (somewhat) recent past by the 1980 Northwest Power Act.

The resurgence of state-based regional planning and governance

The Northwest Power Act made state governments once again a part of regional democracy, and regional planning again rose as a respectable – and fundable – goal, though it was not nearly as broadly oriented as it had been in the early New Deal.² The BPA was still a steward for the region, and the Federal Columbia River Power System still a regional resource, but now the federal agency and the federal dams would be held accountable to their public goals by a state-based council with a professional power system planning staff. (Public goals were still shaped by a rather business-oriented version of the goals of the power system, though: adequate, reliable, efficient – not widely distributed, as in the Bonneville Project Act, or enabling social and economic transformation, as some New Deal regionalists had imagined “giant power” could do.)

New regionalist visions and missions: Energy conservation, fish and wildlife

Energy conservation and fish and wildlife suddenly emerged as central parts of the regional vision and purpose; old ideas of sustainable natural resources and protection of scenic areas transformed into a commitment to find a way for the developed Columbia River to aid in the effort to produce large numbers of salmon.

Native American tribes join the region

Native American tribes emerged from over a century of severe marginalization to become central players in river basin fish and wildlife planning and management, with particularly compelling legal, social, cultural and economic claims on the river.

2. A recent report by the NWPCC's Independent Scientific Advisory Board suggests regional planning should encompass broader issues if it hopes to be effective (Independent Scientific Advisory Board 2007).

Late-twentieth-century and early twenty-first century values, law and science

The rise of wild salmon and the river ecosystem

In the mid-1990s, independent science and scientists became central shapers of regional fish and wildlife conceptions and goals. This was a product of the increased embrace of ecological sciences and the Endangered Species Act, as well as the uncontrollable costs and lost sense of clarity in the NWPCC's fish and wildlife program. The idea of fish and wildlife "protection, mitigation and enhancement" ballooned further into a commitment to wild species and ecosystems, and a vision of a "normative river," as the greatest regionalist goal.

The market claims moral high ground over regionalism

At the same time, the regionalism of public and inexpensive power faced eroded moral power and weight. Old loyalties – and self-interest – had now to protect the regional power system against the ideology of the market, and energy system deregulation. Combined with the wide interconnections of the western power grid, this means that much of the organization and ideals that unified the region and held it together have dissolved. The continuance of the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest rests on the legal and institutional inertia of the Bonneville Project Act, the Pacific Northwest Consumer Power Preference Act, and the Northwest Power Act; of the BPA, the Federal Columbia River Power System and the NWPCC; and of the array of political, social and economic ties and organizations that surround these laws and institutions.

THE POLITICS OF REGIONALISM IN THE COLUMBIA RIVER'S PACIFIC NORTHWEST

As the above analysis of the many varied aspects of the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest reveals, the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest has some aspects of the regionalism that helped shape it, but many have narrowed or morphed; and the region has embedded within itself, too, a host of other characteristics. How and why did the New

Deal-era conception of the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest get narrowed, and how and why and in what ways did the region retain regionalist threads? What resources and interests did these changes and retentions serve?

Overview: The fate of regionalism in the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest

The Columbia River's Pacific Northwest at its inception aimed to achieve at least some regionalist goals. Among these were well-planned and balanced resource development; a spreading out of resource benefits region-wide; broad participation in regional planning; natural resource conservation – including protection of scenic areas and salmon fisheries; the distribution of industry and population, to foster urban-rural balance that would avoid overly large urban conglomerations and bring prosperity to rural areas; a diversified regional economy; and a growth in intra-regional trade that might bring a more independent and stable regional prosperity.

These regionalist visions and goals met one of three fates over the ensuing decades. A good portion of the core vision survived and a few key pieces were implemented in practice. The core vision of the region – an area unified by the Columbia River, in which material prosperity was spread widely throughout the region, and was linked to a beautiful, bountiful and powerful river – largely survived, though its vagueness allowed a wide range of policy and practice. The most important and enduring regionalist practice has been the wide distribution of low-cost power, but other pieces, including the conservation of specific scenic areas and at least some measure of effort to protect salmon fisheries (however hatcheries-centric), have also been constants.

A second portion of the vision and goals was never put into place, or was quickly abandoned. The broadest ambitions fared the worst. Ideas about working to build increased regional economic autonomy and intra-regional trade were never even really tried; even the once widely embraced notion of urban-rural balance was largely forgotten decades ago.

A third set of regionalist ideas and practices has either survived in partial or narrowed form, or else waxed and waned in emphasis over the decades – often, both. The

hope for regional planning in some broad all-encompassing sense was abandoned early on, but it continued in some limited form ever since 1933 (often with federal agencies as the main or sole participants) (Bessey 1963 covers the period 1933-63). More comprehensive regional planning was resurrected in 1980 with the Northwest Power Act – albeit with a somewhat narrower focus (focusing on power and fish and wildlife). Participation in regional governance never did come to work as Marshall Dana wished in 1936 that it could, though it too came closer than ever before with the rise of the NWPCC. The deep abiding sense of regional “homogeneity” that Bessey and McKinley found in 1935 never actually did come together – but a considerable alliance and “regional feeling” in relation to Columbia River development and management were eventually forged. As for the river itself, it is hard to say whether or not it was “conserved.” Dams came to hold and control a large volume of the river system’s waters, and those waters are now used and re-used as people call on them. This was once a good part of what was meant by river “conservation.” But the river’s natural ecosystems, functions and species paid a heavy price. On the other hand, in the last quarter-century the Columbia River’s Pacific Northwest has launched an enormously expensive and ambitious basin-wide fish and wildlife program. While the NWPCC’s fish and wildlife program has its limitations in terms of what it can or will do in relation to the mainstem dams, it is responsible for a huge amount of work that has been undertaken to help Columbia River salmon.

Structural Impediments to Regionalism

This dissertation shows that putting regionalism into practice in the Columbia River’s Pacific Northwest was enormously difficult, and indeed impossible to do completely. Even simply gelling varied and regionalist theory into a specific definition of the Pacific Northwest was a complex and uncertain task, and as became apparent over time, not always or everywhere appreciated. But what needs to be recognized is that the process of narrowing and redirecting regional conceptions and regionalist goals, organization and policy practice, was not total capitulation. To a large extent, it was the

result of a realistic appraisal of what was politically possible; and it allowed the survival of a considerable part of the regionalist vision and its implementation in a range of policy practice.

The Columbia River's Pacific Northwest faced two basic structural impediments. First, it was a *region* – a multi-state area that aimed to function in some way as an integrated whole with a collective vision and governance. Yet it existed and exists within a federal political system in which the basic units of democratic and governmental organization are organized at smaller and larger spatial scales. To function, it had to find support – or at least tolerance – from the political leaders of four different states and the national government, while not itself being entirely of either state or nation. Its opponents, on the other hand, could go to the existing forums of state and federal governments without this complication. They also had forty-six (earlier, forty-four) other states that might help challenge the Pacific Northwest region.

The second basic structural impediment was that the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest aimed to be *regionalist*, at least to some extent; and real regionalism required profound political-economic change. When regionalist policies were proposed, they provoked powerful opposition. Opposition came both from outside – expressed mainly in Washington D.C. – and from within. Even something that seemed likely to please everyone, widely distributing low-cost electricity, proved to anger powerful interests – not only private utilities, but the irrigation magnates of Southern Idaho's Snake River Plain as well. Federal administrative agencies, including the Cabinet heads that sat on Roosevelt's National Resources Committee, opposed proposals for governmental reorganization; for governmental "efficiency" or new social or environmental mandates would come at the cost of their power and authority. More ambitious efforts – actively distributing or redistributing industry or population, or somehow trying to force new trade geographies – were not even seriously imaginable.

But the region and its regionalist aims had several things going for them as well: a basic regional vision that inspired many people – with enough vagueness and flexibility to motivate varied people with rather different interests over many decades; a series of

enthusiastic, dedicated leaders and boosters with the power to push through legislation and administrative policy; and most of all, the incredible bounty of the Columbia River, especially Columbia River hydropower, which repeatedly motivated people in the various parts of the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest to ally with each other to develop, acquire and keep the river's assets.

Negotiating the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest

It was the interface and negotiation between the political challenges to the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest, challenges that derived from its basic structural impediments, and the efforts of the region's proponents and leaders to find workable ways to further their aims, that determined what parts of regionalism survived, what the actual material and policy effects were, and who and what benefited from the practice of the region.

Economic and political interest often drives regionalism; regionalism supports the interests which build it

Although the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest faced basic structural impediments that translated again and again into political challenge, it should not be inferred that political machinations always went against regionalism in the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest. Again and again, embracing or promoting regionalist visions was a strategic way to claim legitimacy for economic and political ambitions that required the authority or finances of the national federal government. The PNWRPC itself embraced regionalist analyses and goals as a conscious and defensive political strategy to retain control of the key economic opportunity of the age, federal Columbia River development. Even the region itself – its boundaries, its defining connections, its central character and goals – grew out of these political aims as much as out of any inherent character. The Northwest Power Act is a more recent example; its rejuvenation of the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest came most fundamentally out of the pursuit of federal financing of more cheap power for the region – financing which might be provided by the regional BPA, but only if the national Congress gave it that authority.

Inevitably this motivation for regionalism has meant that regionalist visions have often served the interests of influential leading economic and political leaders and their particular ambitions. More particularly, it has served those interests that needed some kind of regional alliance or coordination, most often in order to goad national federal action. Usually, these needs and desires related to Columbia River development or cheap Pacific Northwest power or both.

Nonetheless, regionalism reinterprets the economic and political ambitions and reshapes their implementation – often benefiting a wider range of people and places

At the same time, self-interested goals have often, in the process of being legitimated and framed within regionalist ideas, been shaped into broader purposes that have genuinely aimed to bring benefits to a wide public, and to do so in a way that takes into consideration issues of environmental sustainability. Thus once the idea of the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest was embraced by the PNWRPC, that idea helped to shape the proposal for the agency that became the BPA, and the BPA incorporated a considerable portion of the ideals – of spreading benefits, of environmental conservation, of urban-rural balance – into its early practice. The fast-built regional transmission grid, the BPA's support for infant PUDs and rural electrification, and its super-low rates all helped to spread the benefits of Columbia River development very widely very quickly. Such policies were not, it might be noticed, the priorities of the navigation and irrigation activists who had been such long and active campaigners for Columbia River development, and who had helped motivate the initial formation of the PNWRPC.

Regionalism narrows to power and federal funding to win essential near- universal support

Proponents of regionalism and leaders of the BPA and other regional institutions have had to fight to hold centrifugal forces within the region at bay. Conflict among the geographical parts of the so-called region was inevitable as soon as regionalism was narrowed into any kind of specific vision, or institutionalized into any specific agency. The wide enthusiasm for regional planning, like planning more broadly (Graham 1976),

depended on its vagueness, which enabled almost anyone to see it through his or her own ambitions and goals. The Columbia River's Pacific Northwest offered a vision of a region united by shared Columbia River development. But Columbia River development was not a single thing. How and where the river would be developed, and how its benefits would be distributed – these were social, political decisions. Perhaps it was inevitable that the less populated, more rural, upstream areas would be suspicious of the more populated, more urban, downstream areas. Not only were there inequalities of political and economic strength; because water flows downhill, dams in upriver areas would benefit downstream areas more than vice versa. Civic leaders and politicians in upstream areas recognized rightly, too, that downstream interests would want to have considerable control over the water flows out of upstream dams.

The winning strategy to hold the regional parts together has been to offer a resource that everybody wanted, that regional leaders could spread around, so as to – as the Columbia Basin Study put it – “sweeten’ the [regional] thinking process with widely shared material benefits” (PNWRPC, Columbia Basin Study, 1935, in NRC 1936, 152-3). In the introductory chapter I wondered if regional organization that could last in a capitalist democracy actually required regionalizing some basic economic resource. Clearly, cheap power has been the main glue that has held the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest together. But another resource has also worked to a considerable extent: federal money. In both the early PNWRPC and in the current NWPCC's fish and wildlife program, the promise and availability of large sums of money to spread around have provided incentive for collaboration.

Pork barrel distribution and payments mute internal competitive conflict

For a time, regional electric power coordination was embraced without extra motivation, once all utilities could participate, for it provided inherent benefits. Because of the variations in power production and consumption over a large diverse region like the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest, coordination among actors in different places improved everyone's bottom line, by increasing the reliability of their own power supply.

Coordination in the PNWRPC and the NWPCC's fish and wildlife program could not and cannot offer this promise.³ The PNWRPC and the NWPCC's fish and wildlife program undertook and undertake regional planning in order to recommend how federal money should be allocated. This provoked and provokes tensions as different actors, places and jurisdictions compete for priority.

It is because of the inherent problems of a shared but finite pool of money or cheap power that regionalism in the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest has so often taken a pork-barrel approach in which all participants are allocated a negotiated amount. This keeps the competitive tensions at bay. Of course, the recipients of the pork barreling are primarily those that have the power to break down the walls of regional coordination. In other words, appeasing the parts of the region means appeasing the parts with political and legal power. These have grown over time (see below), though.

A key problem for regional coordination in power production and sales today is that the basis for coordination of the regional power system has become far more like that of the PNWRPC and the NWPCC's fish and wildlife program. With the broad interconnections of the western power grid, there is no longer any incentive to restrict power coordination to the Pacific Northwest – and indeed, ever since the Pacific Northwest-Pacific Southwest interties were built in the late 1960s, there have been economically fruitful interchanges with other regions. The distinction between the Pacific Northwest power region and the rest of the West rests now only on BPA's regional preference policies in its sales of firm power. In other words, Pacific Northwest regional cohesion in power rests on sharing a finite pool of economic bounty – and this means there are competitions to control and claim it (as evidenced by proposals to prohibit the formation of new “preference” customers). Perhaps it is not surprising that the regional utilities are now trying to divvy up the BPA pie; in some ways this is a power-side version of pork-barrel distribution.

3. Perhaps if the basin-wide approach to Columbia River fish and wildlife protection and restoration that is advocated by independent scientists, that emphasizes large-scale interconnections and processes, can be made to produce clear results in terms of increasing numbers of salmon, there might be an effect similar to what was achieved in power coordination. For now this remains a very elusive “if.”

For related reasons, the BPA tried in 2002-6 to pay private utilities more than they might have been offered by a strict interpretation of the Northwest Power Act. Because private utilities were not entitled to the same prioritized access to low-cost under the Bonneville Project Act, BPA needed some other way to make sure they reaped pork barrel benefits from the BPA.

To have offerings that motivate regional cohesion, the region must please the nation – and hold together the region's congressional delegation

Regional leaders have had to coax the federal government into providing either federal funds to distribute in the region, or else the authority to distribute Columbia River power or power proceeds preferentially within the region. This is a trick, for regional cohesion has rested on providing a comparative economic advantage to the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest against other states and regions of the nation, and the other states can easily outvote the four-state Pacific Northwest delegation in Congress, and exceed its influence over a given presidential administration. It seems fairly clear that no regional federal power system could be set up today. But in the New Deal, the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest had the great advantage of a president who was enthusiastic about regionalist ideas, and who hoped to set up river basin agencies around the country. Despite Roosevelt's delay and caution in 1936, the BPA would not have been created without him. The Columbia River's Pacific Northwest was helped, too, by the limits to technology of the day: long distance transmission had matured enough to offer the possibility of a transmission grid that could transport power several hundred miles – but not one that could transport power a thousand miles. Thus it was simply assumed, not contested, that the power from Bonneville and Grand Coulee Dams would be used for the cities and farms of the Pacific Northwest rather than broader regions. And the Pacific Northwest was an undeveloped corner of the country at a time when the federal

government was looking for places to invest moneys to promote development that might provide jobs and profitable investment opportunities for business.⁴

Since the New Deal, as political tides shifted far away from New Deal ideals of government provision of economic resources, and as transmission interconnections have extended far beyond the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest, the survival of the region's privileged access to federal Columbia River power, and to federal appropriations and low-interest loans to support regional low-cost power, has depended on two things: positioning the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest as a resource for the nation; and inter-regional deal-making in Congress. The BPA and its Pacific Northwest proved their worth especially in World War II; their continuing provision of power for the Hanford Nuclear Reservation was also a selling point through the Cold War.⁵ As for inter-regional deal-making in Congress, the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest has simply participated in a time-honored negotiation, in which different states and regions engage in mutual back-scratching agreements: they support other regions' and states' claims on special federal subsidies and privileges, in return for support for their own.

The essential requirement of inter-regional back-scratching agreements in Congress has made one political goal paramount: unanimity in the regional congressional delegation. This has meant that BPA has had to work to please, or at least not offend, the federal legislators of the states that make up its service region. Many of the compromises BPA made over time that resulted in a narrowing and reshaping of regionalism can be seen as efforts to meet this requirement.

Political challenge has broadened regionalism's practice

BPA from the beginning rested its legitimacy in the region and in Congress in part on regionalist visions and claims of a bountiful Columbia River and widely shared material benefit and prosperity. Again and again, challengers would invoke these claims

4. Brenner suggests that the New Deal marked a shift in economic geographies rooted in a crisis of capitalist overaccumulation. He argues, following others, that in this era national governments sought to develop undeveloped national hinterlands, precisely to provide new outlets for capital investment (Brenner 1998).

5. Petersen (1995) notes that Congress finally appropriated moneys for the lower Snake River dams during the Korean War, in part because their proximity to Hanford could support further nuclear development.

and these images and demand to be granted a part of the Columbia River's or the BPA's bounty, arguing that only then would the agency's regionalist claims to be achieved. These strategies were particularly effective at times when the BPA sought to expand in some way, and needed Congressional support. Thus it was that private utilities and nonfederal public utilities won a seat at the table of Columbia River water management and Pacific Northwest power management when the BPA sought the Columbia River Treaty; a key part of their strategy was to argue that the federal monopoly on decision-making was authoritarian and exclusive. States could make a very similar argument when BPA sought greater authority to fund new generation in what became the Northwest Power Act. Fish and wildlife managers and other salmon advocates could throw the BPA's claims of environmental bounty and beneficence in the agency's face – especially as Michigan Representative John Dingell held the Northwest Power Act in committee until fish and wildlife provisions were added – and in the 1990s as species after species of salmon was listed under the ESA.

— In short, it has often been through political contest that regionalism has become more genuinely democratic, participatory, and inclusive in its distribution of benefits – including providing genuine benefit to fish and wildlife.

LESSONS FOR COLUMBIA RIVER POLITICS TODAY

The Mainstem Fight: National versus Regional

Since 2000, many salmon advocates have promoted breaching the lower Snake River dams as the most important action needed in the Columbia River system (e.g. Save Our Wild Salmon Coalition 2005a). Environmental groups remain largely fixated on the mainstem dams in other ways too, and their strategies have focused on *federal* mainstem dams in particular in the belief that salmon advocates can exert more leverage over federal dams than non-federal ones. The initial selection of the lower Snake River dams as the target for a dam removal campaign in the Columbia system was a strategic decision, for these dams were seen as the dams in the system with the fewest direct

economic beneficiaries. Idaho Power's Hells Canyon Complex, which blocks salmon entirely from the upper Snake and its tributaries, Grand Coulee and Chief Joseph Dams, which block access to the upper Columbia, or the John Day dam would be equally good targets based on biological information – and removing or drawing down the John Day would have the advantage of aiding both Columbia River salmon and Snake River salmon. These dams, however, were deemed to provide too many economic benefits, and too tied to powerful interests.

But so far, salmon advocates have had little success in their campaign to have the lower Snake River dams removed. Although the winds may change with a new presidential administration, the strength and clarity of the opposition since 2000 seems daunting. What it seems salmon advocates did not entirely bargain for was that because the lower Snake dams are part of the Federal Columbia River Power System, they are inextricably linked to a powerful region-wide political alliance that sees itself as stewards for regional good, and which feels rather unstable and vulnerable – and therefore inflexibly self-protective. There were already threats to the BPA coming from Congress before 2000; the George W. Bush administration has upped the threat with repeated proposals to force the BPA to raise its rates.⁶ The 2001 West Coast energy crisis only made BPA utility customers and *their* many, many customers – who are also the constituents of the Pacific Northwest delegation – far more nervous about giving up any of the Federal Columbia River Power System's power. Though Columbia River power was in relatively low supply that year, the BPA still delivered and sold its expected firm power to its regional customers, and at reasonable rates too. Any power lost to the Federal Columbia River Power System by breaching dams, increasing spill, or drawing down reservoirs now has the alarming implication that the Pacific Northwest must get that power from someone else – and thus be vulnerable to market fluctuations and manipulations.

6. Earlier proposals were for market rates. The Pacific Northwest congressional delegation ardently and unanimously fought off this proposal. More recent proposals have been more modest, suggesting quicker repayment of the federal treasury for BPA's debts. These would require higher rates, and the congressional delegation has unanimously fought these, too.

Perhaps salmon advocates simply underestimated the political strength of the BPA-centered regional political alliance in the national Congress and presidential administration, even in its seeming vulnerability. Advocates of dam breaching do have considerable awareness of the political power of the BPA and its regional political allies within the region, so one of their key strategies has been “jumping scales” (Cox 1998) to the national polity. In 1999-2000, environmentalists and Native American tribes took their case to the national Congress, where they fanned the flames of anti-BPA rhetoric advanced by the Northeast-Midwest Coalition, a group of Congress people from other regions jealous of the Pacific Northwest’s low power rates (Barker 1999; Swisher 1999; Munson 2001). The *New York Times* (Editorial Desk 2000) and other papers ran sympathetic editorials, and presidential candidate Al Gore listened closely (see e.g. Montana 2001a). Since 2000 salmon advocates have repeatedly had bills introduced to study how the lower Snake dams might be removed and its economic losses mitigated (see *Salmon Planning Act* 2007). But the over-all effect seems only to have strengthened the circling of the regional wagons, and the success in holding off threats from the national government.⁷

It seems that as long as the BPA and the regional delegation dig in their heels, it is unlikely that Congress will pass any bill against their united front.⁸ As suggested in Chapter Six, it may be that a more effective political strategy could be to ally *with* the BPA and its allies to create a united regional political coalition that could advance the concerns of both regional power and Columbia River fish in the halls of the national Congress. Steve Weiss of the Northwest Energy Coalition suggests environmental groups are beginning to contemplate this idea, and that clearly at least a piece of a deal would be to have U.S. taxpayers rather than Pacific Northwest electric power customers (through

7. In the recent era of free market ascendancy supported by a conservative Bush administration and Republican-dominated Congress, it was helpful for the regional cause of retaining special privileged access to cheap Columbia River power that several members of the Pacific Northwest delegation fighting to retain BPA have been strong Republicans. The bipartisan nature of the Columbia River’s Pacific Northwest political coalition has definitely helped it weather changing political tides.

8. In this forum, it does not hurt that the Army Corps of Engineers, which owns and operates the lower Snake dams – as well as a majority of the other Federal Columbia River Power System dams – has so many powerful friends in Congress that hail from the other forty-six states.

the BPA) pay for dam removal. Getting Congress and the President to agree to such a deal would be a challenge, but given the national enthusiasm among environmentalists for Pacific Northwest salmon and for dam removal, it is not unimaginable.

As suggested in Chapter Six, though, this strategy may become more and more difficult as the regional power system fragments. Fragmentation is not necessarily to be welcomed; there could be considerable strength in allying with a bloc whose political strategies and machinations are as well-oiled as those of the BPA and its congressional allies.

Joining the fight for the normative river

While environmentalists remain fixated on the mainstem dams, like it or not, there is little likelihood of fundamental change on the mainstem any time soon. The salmon advocates who work for the states and tribes of the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest focus much of their time and energy on a forum largely abandoned by environmentalists: the NWPCC's fish and wildlife program. The state and tribal fish and wildlife managers do incredibly important and good work, both in developing policy recommendations and prescriptions and in carrying out projects funded by the NWPCC's program, but they suffer at times from being too invested in their own particular projects and budgets, and the fish and wildlife program as a whole suffers with them. The tensions over ESA litigation have exacerbated conflicts among the state and tribal fish and wildlife managers, and created deeply divided factions that have limited ability to work constructively together. The NWPCC's program could use more political advocates for its region-wide approach, and the difficult effort of moving toward policies and projects that can support broad-scale processes, functions and interconnections as the *Return to the River* reports have suggested. This is a project worth engaging in, even if it cannot – as the Columbia Basin Study said of a somewhat different effort – achieve the 'City of God.' (See quote at the start of Chapter Four.)

Breaking free of the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest?

Besides the salmon advocates' strategy of politically jumping scales, it may also be worth *conceptually* jumping scales – or just reimagining geographies. It is mostly the interests that want to *protect* the lower Snake dams that suggest bringing ocean ecologies and harvest into analyses of Columbia River salmon (e.g. Lewiston Chamber of Commerce 1999), but reimagining Columbia River salmon as animals that range all the way to Alaska – and even sometimes stray into other river systems – might help break out the confines of the BPA-centered Columbia River's Pacific Northwest, and also would in fact be a geographical framing more appropriate for salmon rather than a regional power system. Opening up thinking to include connections of hydrology and ecology, social well-being and political strategy, that extend into the Canadian portion of the Columbia Basin, could bring in the strengths and awareness of a strong regionalist community development group that has grown up there in recent years, the Columbia Basin Trust (Halleran 1998; Columbia Basin Trust 2001).

Most important is simply making public the insight that a framing of salmon conservation within the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest means a framing that is fundamentally about the BPA and a regional power system, *not* about the natural, obvious, eternal geography of salmon. This reveals right away the political nature of the geography and makes its background bottom-line a publicly ask-able political question.

THE POTENTIAL OF REGIONALISM IN THE COLUMBIA RIVER'S PACIFIC NORTHWEST AND BEYOND

Proponents of regionalism, both in the distant and more recent past, have often lamented, even despaired over, the influence of politics on regionalist efforts. When they have looked at the fate of New Deal institutions shaped in part by the ideas of regionalism – most attention has been paid to the Tennessee Valley Authority – they have bemoaned the abandonment of regionalist principles. They see capitulation to political and economic pressures – pressures from big business and other economic interests, from

powerful federal agencies and local elites, and later, from the all-encompassing drive to win World War II – as the end of regionalism’s promise in the New Deal (Selznick 1953; Voeltz 1960; Sussman 1976; Grant 1978; Friedmann and Weaver 1979; Clawson 1981; Callahan 1980; Hargrove and Conkin 1983; Chandler 1984; Creese 1990; Dorman 1993; Hargrove 1994; Spann 1996).

But politics and regionalism in the Columbia River’s Pacific Northwest could not be separated, and it seems quite clear that they could not be anywhere else, either. Regionalism was itself driven partly by political interest; and like any product of politics, it tended to support the politically powerful and their ideas of social and environmental benefit. This dissertation suggests quite clearly that regionalism in practice – at least within a large-scale capitalist representative democracy – can never meet its ambitions.

It has been too easy for advocates of regionalist ideas, including advocates of community natural resource management, watershed and ecosystem management, to advance recent regionalist efforts as entirely new. Those who trace the ideas further back too often dismiss earlier regionalist efforts as long ago failed, their traces entirely gone. By tracing regionalist ideas and practices forward over seventy years I have shown that New Deal regionalism is *not* entirely gone. But it has been culled, narrowed and reshaped in the face of real-world economic and political pressures. Such has been the price of survival.

The problem is that regionalism’s ideals are so often promoted as fundamentally apolitical and anti-political that their promoters too easily end up in denial of the ways regionalism, too, can become a tool of politics. They have often been in denial, too, of the fact that only a profound confrontation with dominant political-economic structures and interests could actually begin to achieve some of its more fundamental goals (Weaver 1984 has the best broad critique of modern regionalism’s failures to challenge political economic structure). Because regions are promoted and seen as natural, rooted in physical geographical connections and human communities that grow up around them, they can mask the politics and economic interests embedded within their boundaries and conceptions. As argued again and again by geographers in recent years, any grouping of

space and territory, any boundaries, limit and exclude at the same time they include. Regionalists too often want to deny this.

The ideal of regionalism was and is implicitly founded on a notion of a kind of regional autonomy, and a restructuring of political economy within regions. Both external and internal regional restructuring are almost universally as politically unpalatable as they were for Howard Odum, who was so careful to avoid association with calls for Southern secession. The ideas of rural-urban interdependence that were espoused by some among the RPAA, or the human-environmental interdependence espoused by today's bioregionalists, rely on at least relative regional autonomy in economics, resources, population, and governance. Mutual respect between rural and urban, Black and white, human and environment, upstream and downstream – all of these, whether explicitly or implicitly, are assumed to arise from the interdependence, shared interest and mutual understanding that are romanticized as naturally evolving in a relatively self-contained system.

Yet no such restructuring was going to happen in the Pacific Northwest to any great extent any more than it was in the South – even in the New Deal, the time the United States was perhaps the most politically open to radical redistribution and restructuring. As the PNWRPC reported in the back pages of its Columbia Basin Study, political and business leaders were even in 1935 unwilling to undertake any kind of fundamental restructuring of the regional economy in ways that might contain the region's economic geography, or bring about the kind of truly shared prosperity that regionalists envisioned. The PNWRPC grouped all these ideas under the term “social planning,” and, in a passage likely penned by Professor McKinley, wrote a realistic appraisal of its chances:

The recrudescence of ‘rugged individualism’ which is already manifested and may be expected to show itself increasingly if prosperity returns for business and professional classes, makes it hazardous in the extreme to embrace in planning such basic questions as wages and profits, social insurance, relation of industrial production in the Northwest to a balanced regional and national economy, and conflicts between various social classes.... The best opportunity to have entered the field of social

planning, so far as popular support is concerned, came during the past 2 years. But nothing was done or seriously attempted.... (NRC 1936, 151).

Despite these basic structural limitations, regionalism was not lost, meaningless, or betrayed in the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest, nor is it insignificant and hopeless in other contexts – at least not entirely. This dissertation suggests that regionalism, even when forced to compromise with real-world pressures, can still be a potent force with considerable positive effect. The progenitors and promoters of the idea of the Columbia River-centered Pacific Northwest may have absorbed the ideas and principles of regionalism strategically and selectively, they may have made compromise after compromise, deal after deal, along the way, but they absorbed regionalist ideals nonetheless. The shared self-interested goal of Columbia River development was reframed into regionalist purposes that genuinely aimed to bring benefits to a wide public, and do so in a way that took into consideration issues of environmental sustainability. When they failed to achieve these goals in ways that affected wide publics with political and legal power, they could be challenged and forced to do better. Together, ideals and political challenge have built a region that has actually provided unusual regional collaboration and significant, widespread social and environmental benefit. Regionalism, especially in the company of access for political challenge can achieve real good.

BROADER IMPLICATIONS AND FURTHER QUESTIONS

At the end of the day I am left with two further meta-questions. Is regionalism in the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest different from any other governmental institution's claims to provide public benefit – in which ideals are joined with political and economic interest, but vested interests grow to dominate over time unless they are further challenged? And if it is, is regionalism in the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest a good thing – given that it has been seen as oppressive by many, and used by powerful interests to get government subsidies?

A Regional Iron Triangle?

Ultimately, regionalism and the BPA-centered political alliance that have furthered regionalist ideas and some regionalist policies in the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest seem more like other political ideals, institutions and alliances than different. In a sense the BPA and the federal agencies that run the Federal Columbia River Power System, their power customers, and the Pacific Northwest congressional delegation formed a fairly traditional political "iron triangle" that just happened to be regionally organized. Like other iron triangles – that supporting the forestry industry's influence over the US Forest Service, for example – it has faced far more political and legal challenges in recent decades, and has been forced to open up to new constituencies, including environmental ones.

Yet it seems to me that the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest was less entirely coopted in some ways, and ultimately more answerable and responsible to these outside challengers, than many other iron triangles. This may have had as much to do with how the Bonneville Project Act influenced the structure of the Pacific Northwest electric power industry, and the fact that electric power is truly a resource used by everyone, as the fact that the system was regional. Thanks to the BPA's provision of power to large and small public utilities at very low cost, the Columbia River's bounty truly did reach a wide public, and created a primary constituency with a remarkably wide geographical, economic and social base. It was an unusual enough setup that that constituency and the BPA itself had to continually promote notions of regionalism – and adopt regionalist policies – to legitimate themselves. If the regional organization had a role, perhaps it was simply to make the system particularly vulnerable to dissolution, and therefore that much more committed to please.

I cannot help but think, too, that the bountiful Columbia River environment, and the BPA's and others' repeated invocations of the river's beauty and power in their imagery and other promotions, played a role in allowing environmental interests in

particular to finally insert themselves as central bearers of the region's meaning and essence.

The Region versus its Parts

The question of whether regionalism is good ultimately is a question of whether centralized or collective broad-scale planning and governance are better than the rights and opportunities of smaller jurisdictions and individuals. In the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest, this has a very specific geographical dimension, for the idea of the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest, and the leadership in the institutions and politics which implement and protect it, come largely from the states of Oregon and Washington. It has much less hold on the imagination – indeed has often been portrayed simply as “federal government” intrusion (e.g. Brooks 2006) – in Idaho and Montana. There is no simple answer here. But for those who hope to further some kind of broad collective good, the Columbia River's Pacific Northwest offers an example in which despite many compromises and conflicts, indeed often through many compromises and conflicts, regionalism has achieved some good. The Columbia River's Pacific Northwest is no utopia, certainly no ecotopia (Callenbach 1975), but considerable good has been achieved, and continues to be possible.

APPENDIX

ARCHIVAL SOURCES

Most references in the text to archival sources are from two collections. These are cited with abbreviated references to these collections. The following abbreviations were used:

McKinley Papers

The Charles McKinley Papers, 1930-1968. Division of Special Collections and University Archives, University of Oregon, Eugene.

NRPB Records

National Resources Planning Board: Correspondence and related records 1933-1943. RG 187. National Archives and Records Administration, Pacific Alaska Region, Seattle.

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