

## **BLM Study Review of Hells Canyon Complex Studies**

### **Recreation**

#### **Chapter E.5-1 – E.5-13**

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**Introduction.** The studies referenced above are reports on recreation use, visitor survey results, and findings of past and present recreation use on the Snake River below Hells Canyon dam.

**Conclusion.** The studies reached conclusions on the amount and type of visitor use that occurs. The studies also detail demographics of users, types of conflicts that may occur, crowding, and carrying capacity. Most of the research is broken down by specific river reach, from Hells Canyon dam to Cache Creek, the northern boundary of Hells Canyon Recreation Area.

Interestingly, there are few discussions or conclusions of the impact of dam operations on recreation use. Mostly these studies are a summary of use.

**Study Adequacy.** I found the studies to be inadequate for the following reasons:

1. The study boundaries end at the northern boundary of the Hells Canyon National Recreation Area, but recreation use and the impacts from dam operations extend all the way to slack water at Asotin. In fact the case can be made that there is more recreation use on the flowing section of the Snake below the HCNRA than there is between Hells Canyon dam and Cache Creek. Consequently, there is more impact on recreation users below the HCNRA than on recreation users in the study area.
2. Boaters entering the study area from the Lower Salmon River are not accounted for in any of the studies, even though the information was shared with Idaho Power Company. The number of float boaters entering the Snake River from the Salmon has exceeded the total number of float boaters entering the Snake from all other portals combined since 1997, yet this group of recreation users is not considered in any of the studies.
3. Since nearly all of the beach camping areas are found below the mouth of the Salmon, it is logical that the impacts from flow fluctuations would be greatest on recreation users below the mouth of the Salmon. This is not addressed in the study.

**BLM Conclusions and Recommendations.** The studies that were conducted missed a large segment of Snake River recreation users, and did not cover the entire area that is impacted by the Hells Canyon Complex.

We recommend Lower Salmon River boaters and recreation users below the Hells Canyon National Recreation Area be considered when impacts on recreation are discussed and mitigation is considered. This is a larger population of users than the population that is addressed in the referenced studies, and this large number of users should have a voice in the proceedings.

Extreme low and high water flows cause problems in the areas below the HCNRA boundary. Specific mitigation measures which could mitigate these problems include:

- Development of Law Enforcement MOUs with Nez Perce County and Asotin County for assistance with search and rescue (low flows are the cause of many boating accidents);
- Development of a new ramp at Heller Bar Recreation Site to accommodate low water launches.
- Development of an agreement with Asotin County for road maintenance of the Heller Bar road (road is sometimes inundated during high flows, and receives additional use during low flows due to difficult navigation below Heller Bar.)