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**STATEMENT OF  
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Before the  
Oversight Hearing of  
Committee on Resources,  
Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health  
U.S. House of Representatives

April 14, 1998  
Nampa, Idaho

Concerning: Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project (ICBEMP)

**Madam Chairman:**

**I am Chuck Findley, Deputy Regional Administrator for Region 10 of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). I am here at your request to provide the Subcommittee with additional testimony on the Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project, including EPA's regulatory role -- both currently and historically -- as well as our view of the project's potential impact on local communities.**

**EPA SUPPORT FOR THE ICBEMP**

**I would like to begin by expressing EPA's strong support for the purpose and needs that have been established for this Project -- restoring and maintaining ecosystem health and ecological integrity, supporting the economic and social needs of people, cultures, and communities, and providing sustainable and predictable levels of products from Forest Service and BLM-administered lands. Satisfying these purposes and needs is key to healthy watersheds, aquatic ecosystems and, ultimately, the communities, both large and small, that depend on them. Our philosophy has been, and continues to be, to put effort in**

**up-front to ensure that the overall objectives, standards and guides are protective of our air and water resources. This is simply more efficient than being involved on a project-by-project basis. We believe it also helps provide a more consistent flow of goods and services to our communities and the public because projects will be less likely to be challenged.**

**If protective land management practices are not dealt with adequately through this environmental impact statement process, they will likely be dealt with later, through the courts. History tell us this will be the likely scenario if we are not successful up front.**

We believe the DEISs provide an adequate framework for planning, setting priorities, and decision making for managing the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands within the Basin that will satisfy the purpose and needs and the specific ecosystem management goals proposed in the Draft Environmental Impact Statements (DEISs). The Objectives and Standards, the hierarchal assessment and decision processes, and the opportunities for collaboration among local, Tribal, State, and federal agencies that have been proposed for implementing the Project should provide an effective decision framework that will allow sustained delivery of goods and services to the communities in the Basin and the general public without unduly jeopardizing the integrity of aquatic systems, water quality, and air quality.

**I would like to take this opportunity to commend the Forest Service and BLM for their exemplary efforts, from the earliest stages of the Project, to provide opportunities for public involvement in the planning process, particularly for the Counties and local communities in the Basin. Those opportunities continue to be provided even now, as we near the end of the public comment period of the DEISs.**

## **EPA INVOLVEMENT IN THE ICBEMP**

**EPA's decision to invest resources in the Project is based on the premise that it is far more cost effective to collaborate and address concerns early in the process than it is to wait and attempt to resolve differences that are identified on a project by project basis. EPA assigned staff to both the Walla Walla and Boise EIS teams shortly after they were established with the goal of providing perspective and assistance to the teams relative to the requirements of the Clean Water Act and Clean Air Act as the environmental assessment and impact determinations were debated.**

**Yes, we've had some disagreements and differences of opinion in the past four years, which is understandable given the different mandates that guide our respective agencies. But at the executive level there continues to be a firm commitment to forge agreements that meet each agency's mandate and interest in stewardship of our country's natural resources. Decision making at the policy level has been a joint and collaborative process among all five of the agencies involved. I am confident this mode of operation will continue.**

**EPA's current involvement in the Project remains one of strong support. We have committed the resources necessary to assure it moves forward as quickly and efficiently as possible to a final decision. Reaching resolution will mean that the critically important environmental restoration work can begin to protect the region's land and water, helping to provide predictable and sustainable levels of goods and services for Basin communities.**



## **EPA INVOLVEMENT IN IMPLEMENTATION**

More specific to EPA's area of responsibilities, you are probably aware that EPA and the States in the Northwest are facing a monumental task in addressing the hundreds of water bodies that have been listed under the Clean Water Act as impaired in each state. Lawsuits in each state are forcing substantial resource commitments to develop specific plans and implementation measures to return listed waters to compliance in reasonable time frames. Many of the listed waters are on federal lands and we view the provisions of the ICBEMP as a vital component in assuring that those waters are addressed, both now and as the Project is implemented. Many of the impaired waters are listed because they do not support beneficial uses. For example, many waters no longer support all life stages of certain fish, such as salmon. In such cases, we are committed to working with the land management agencies and with the National Marine Fisheries Service and the Fish and Wildlife Service to concurrently address both Clean Water Act and Endangered Species Act requirements to avoid potentially duplicative efforts for all involved.

**The debate over protective forest and land management practices will occur, either in this EIS format, or if not dealt with adequately, in the courts. We realize that even if we are successful in reaching a Record of Decision through this collaborative process, legal challenges may still occur during implementation. We believe however, that the basis for specific projects will be more easily defended if such litigation proves unavoidable.**

**EPA will commit resources and continue to work with the land management agency partners in a collaborative manner for the duration of the Project. Assuming the**

**production of a final EIS and Record of Decision, EPA expects to participate in implementation of the Project with a level of resources sufficient to provide the Forest Service and BLM with technical assistance and support in their planning, assessment, and decision processes to assure that Clean Water Act, Clean Air Act, and other EPA responsibilities are appropriately addressed. We would expect our level of involvement to decrease over time, as we gain confidence that these responsibilities are being carried out satisfactorily.**

#### **PAST AND FUTURE RESOURCE COMMITMENTS**

Beginning in FY 1994, EPA committed two full-time staff to the project, one on the EIS team in Walla Walla, and the other on the Science Assessment Team. In fiscal year 1995, after the Boise office opened, another part time staff person was assigned to that EIS team. During fiscal year 1996, EPA's resource commitment shifted from EIS team involvement, which was primarily technical in nature, to issue resolution which required policy level staff. Since fiscal year 1997, our involvement has been largely at the policy level.

**EPA's approach is to be more involved initially on selected projects, but to reduce our involvement as we gain confidence that standards are applied consistently. We don't envision being involved in-depth for a long period of time.**

**We believe we can accomplish our goals in the collaborative process by focusing our limited resources on the most sensitive and complex environmental issues. Our goal is to provide staff and resources sufficient to assure success of the project that are appropriate to the nature of the issues and challenges that arise.**

**CLOSING**

**In closing, EPA believes the direction and goals of the Interior Columbia Project are worthy of continued support, both by the communities, the public, and interest groups that will be most impacted by it, and by governments at all levels -- local, Tribal, state, and federal agencies, and Congress. EPA is committed to supporting the Project and assuring its success. The strength of the project is its framework of: (1) broad public participation opportunities, (2) ability to address regional landscape scale issues, (3) default standards that can be changed to fit local conditions through the conduct of ecosystem analysis at the watershed scale, (4) intergovernmental collaboration opportunities, and (5) a balance of economic, social, and ecological interests.**

**Thank you, Madam Chairman, for inviting me to address this oversight hearing of your Subcommittee. This concludes my statement and I would be happy to address any questions you may have.**