

Navigation versus Upper Basin Fisheries –

Under the Corps current plan, the navigation industry would lose five days at the end of the season in November. Under that same scenario, Lake Sakakawea's elevation in August, the critical warm water month, could be about 1819.4 under the most likely scenario and 1814.1 under the lower decile scenario. The critical elevation to maintain sufficient cold water habitat in Lake Sakakawea is estimated to be about 1825. Obviously, the cold water dependent species, salmon and smelt, in Lake Sakakawea are in jeopardy. Should we lose a large portion of the smelt population as we did in the late 1980s and early 1990s, it will take ten or more years to recover as it did then. South Dakota's Lake Oahe's fishery is testament to what happens when the smelt forage base is decimated. The loss of five days or even a whole season of navigation versus the loss of the fisheries in all three upper basin reservoirs for ten years or more is the issue. This is not fairly sharing the pain of drought.

Fishery Issues -

Lake Oahe has receded from North Dakota. The fishery and recreation access that existed there are already severely impacted. Visitation and recreational use of Lake Oahe in North Dakota is a fraction of what it has been in the past. Prior to the current drought, Lake Oahe's walleye fishery had become a nationally recognized recreation opportunity. That fishery has suffered from the loss of its smelt forage base since 1997 causing South Dakota to enact special liberal catch limits and other promotions to retain some of the recreation activity on that reservoir.

As the result of the smelt die off during the drought of the early 1990s, the Lake Sakakawea walleye and salmon fisheries suffered a tremendous set back. Walleye spawning substrate was lost for several years during the low water so reproduction was curtailed. Substantial stocking from the Garrison Dam National Fish Hatchery was critical to maintaining even minimal walleye year classes. Lake Sakakawea's walleye fishery was also nationally renowned hosting several major tournaments.

Lake Sakakawea's chinook salmon fishery and associated fishing activity dwindled to near nothing as a direct result of lost coldwater habitat during the drought of the late 1980's and early 1990's. We have painful, recent knowledge about low water impacts to the salmon fishery. It took at least ten years to restore the fishery and associated recreation to what existed prior to the last drought. Low water during the last two years of the current drought has already had a negative impact on the growth rate of Lake Sakakawea salmon and on fishing success. It is safe to assume that if a substantial portion of the smelt population is lost again, it will take another ten years or more with adequate cold water habitat to rebound to 2001 equivalent conditions. Since Lake Sakakawea water levels rebounded very quickly after the last drought due to the catastrophic 1993 flooding, it could take much more than ten years for Lake Sakakawea's salmon fishery to rebound after this drought.

Continuing the salmon fishery during, and for a time after, the last drought was dependent upon obtaining fertilized eggs from South Dakota where the salmon fared better. The Missouri River chinook salmon is the only certified disease free population in

North America. The Garrison Dam National Fish Hatchery is a certified disease free facility. As a result, bringing fertilized eggs from a source other than Missouri River salmon is not possible. The salmon fishery is totally dependent upon artificial stocking. No stocking – no salmon.

A major handicap today, is the fact that South Dakota has essentially discontinued their salmon stocking program due to Lake Oahe's poor forage base. Obtaining fertilized salmon eggs from that fishery to supplement what can be obtained in Lake Sakakawea as was done in the last drought is not likely. The result will be a protracted recovery period if, indeed, it can be recovered at all.