

379
N81
No. 7597

THE POWER POLITICS OF HELLS CANYON

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
University of North Texas in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

By

John Matthew Alford, B.A.

Denton, Texas

August, 1999

Alford, John Matthew, The Power Politics of Hells Canyon. Master of Arts (History), August, 1999, 95 pp., references, 97 titles.

This study examines the controversy regarding Hells Canyon on the Snake River, North America's deepest gorge. Throughout the 1950s, federal and private electric power proponents wrangled over who would harness the canyon's potential for generating hydroelectricity. After a decade of debate, the privately-owned Idaho Power Company won the right to build three small dams in the canyon versus one large public power structure.

Sources include unpublished government documents found at the Dwight D. Eisenhower and Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Libraries, regional and national newspapers, and congressional documents such as the Congressional Record and House and Senate hearings. The thesis concludes that private development of Hells Canyon led to incomplete resource development. Further, support of private development led to extensive Republican electoral losses in the Pacific Northwest during the 1950s.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
INTRODUCTION.....	1
 Chapter	
1. PARTNERSHIP AND WITHDRAWAL.....	10
2. FALLOUT FROM THE HELLS CANYON DECISION.....	25
3. HELLS CANYON IN CONGRESS, THE FEDERAL COURTS, AND THE COURT OF PUBLIC OPINION.....	43
4. THE END OF HELLS CANYON.....	62
 CONCLUSION.....	 82
 BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	 89

INTRODUCTION

Originating in Wyoming's Yellowstone National Park, the Snake River flows 1,036 miles through the states of Wyoming, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington. The Snake travels west across the plains of southern Idaho before it turns northward to form part of the Idaho-Oregon border. This mighty river creates a series of spectacular waterfalls in Idaho, many of which give their names to nearby cities, such as Twin Falls, Idaho Falls, and American Falls. These waterfalls pale in comparison, however, with the forbidding wilderness between Idaho's Seven Devils Mountains and Oregon's Wallowa Mountains named Hells Canyon. For thirty miles, the Snake tumbles through the canyon, dropping an average of twelve feet per mile. At one point, Hells Canyon is 7,923 feet deep, making it the deepest gorge in North America.¹

The magnificent backdrop of Hells Canyon was the site of a rancorous political battle during the presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower. Advocates of both federal and private power development realized that besides its natural beauty, the Hells Canyon reach was an extraordinary natural resource. The Snake's annual thirty-seven million acre-feet stream flow and the river's precipitous drop in the canyon made the gorge one of America's last undeveloped damsites. Federal and private power supporters vigorously debated the best way to develop the canyon's potential for generating electricity. The two

1. Keith C. Peterson and Mary E. Reed, Controversy, Conflict, and Compromise: A History of the Lower Snake River Development (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1994), 1-2; F. Ross Peterson, Idaho: A Bicentennial History (New York: W.W. Norton, 1976), 6-8.

sides fought their battle in Congress, in the federal courts, and before the Federal Power Commission (FPC). Eventually, the FPC ruled in favor of Idaho Power and awarded the company a license to produce electricity at three dams in Hells Canyon. The corporation's development resulted in the inefficient use of Hells Canyon as a water power resource, and the American people lost the gorge's potential benefits. The Republican Eisenhower administration and the Democratic Congress share culpability for the loss of Hells Canyon, a loss that represented the abandonment of traditional American natural resource policy.²

The Hells Canyon controversy began innocuously on 23 June 1947, when the Idaho Power Company filed a preliminary permit with the FPC to build a new hydroelectric plant at Oxbow in Hells Canyon. Secretary of the Interior Julius Krug and Senator Glen Taylor, an Idaho Democrat, both filed protests with the FPC, effectively blocking the company's plans. Although the national government had no plans to develop Hells Canyon at the time, Krug and Taylor noted that the United States Bureau of Reclamation and Army Corps of Engineers recommended developing the canyon as a potential hydroelectric resource. The FPC, therefore, voted to hold the corporation's application in abeyance for three years. On 15 December 1950, Idaho Power applied for a formal license to build five dams in Hells Canyon. Secretary of the Interior Oscar Chapman filed a protest with the FPC and suggested that the commission reject Idaho Power's plans. The FPC delayed the matter another eighteen months to give Congress time to study the issue. Congress, however, did not even vote on the one bill introduced

2. Robert Tininenko, "Middle Snake River Development: The Controversy Over Hells Canyon, 1947-1955" (master's thesis, Washington State University, 1967), 20.

between 1947 and 1953 that authorized Bureau of Reclamation development of Hells Canyon.³

The dispute over the gorge centered on two competing development plans for Hells Canyon. Advocates of federal development relied on Bureau of Reclamation plans that called for one 722-foot high multiple-purpose hydroelectric dam in the canyon. A structure such as the one proposed developed all aspects of the resource's potential. The proposed federal Hells Canyon dam would produce electricity, create a reservoir for flood control storage, and provide latent recreational and navigational benefits. Government officials estimated that a multiple-purpose Hells Canyon dam would cost \$560 million, including \$144 million for transmission lines and \$59 million for turbines and generators. American taxpayers would foot the cost of the Bureau of Reclamation plan, but government power supporters noted that the federal edifice would more than pay for itself in fifty years. Projections showed that the federal project would generate an ultimate power capacity of 1.2 million kilowatts and would create a ninety-two-mile long reservoir that could store 3.9 million acre-feet of water for flood control.⁴

In contrast, the modest Idaho Power proposal for Hells Canyon provided for construction of three dams, the tallest reaching only 395 feet.⁵ The private company

3. Judson King, The Conservation Fight (Washington, D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1959), 293-295; Charles McKinley, Uncle Sam in the Pacific Northwest (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1952), 473-476; Report, "Hells Canyon: A National Issue," April 1955, 155-E-8 Hells Canyon Dam (1) folder, Box 838, Official File, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library; Report, "Hells Canyon Summary," May 1957, Hells Canyon folder, Box 2, Fred Seaton Papers, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library; "Three Major Projects in Controversy," Congressional Digest, December 1955, 295-296.

4. Report, "Hells Canyon Summary," May 1957, Hells Canyon folder, Box 2, Fred Seaton Papers, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library.

5. Idaho Power revised its plans for Hells Canyon in 1952, calling for three dams instead of five.

projected that its Oxbow, Brownlee, and Hells Canyon structures ultimately could produce 900 thousand kilowatts of power and would create a twenty-three-mile long reservoir with 1.1 million acre-feet of flood control storage. Idaho Power's development cost \$133 million, none of which came from the federal treasury. The company's supporters appealed to expediency in arguing that they could build the three structures within five years while the federal structure required ten years of construction.⁶

The question of who developed Hells Canyon involved ideological questions as well. Proponents of private development appealed to the ideas of states' rights and local control. They averred that the company's plans for Hells Canyon achieved the same goals that Bureau of Reclamation development promised. Idaho Power's champions included business groups in the Pacific Northwest and Republican politicians such as Governor Len Jordan of Idaho. Champions of federal development argued that only the Bureau of Reclamation could develop Hells Canyon's full natural resource potential. Federal power supporters maintained that their plan would produce more electricity than the Idaho Power proposal and could contribute to better flood control, navigation, and recreation in the Pacific Northwest. Most Democratic politicians, including Senators Wayne Morse and Richard Neuberger of Oregon, endorsed federal development of Hells Canyon. Morse, Neuberger, and Gracie Pfof, an Idaho representative, introduced the major legislation sponsoring a Bureau of Reclamation dam in Hells Canyon. Groups

6. Federal Power Commission, Project Nos. 1971, 2132, and 2133: Idaho Power Company, 14 FPC 57 (1955).

such as the National Hells Canyon Association and Farmers Unions in the Pacific Northwest provided pivotal grassroots support for the one structure proposal.⁷

Federal and private power advocates agreed on little other than that the Pacific Northwest states of Idaho, Oregon, and Washington desperately needed more electric power to serve a growing population. After World War II, the region's expanding industrial base, especially the aluminum and aircraft industries, brought thousands of newcomers and new jobs to the region. Continued immigration into the Pacific Northwest between 1940 and 1950 contributed to a 34 percent increase in the region's population, a growth rate more than twice the national average. Demographers predicted another 50 percent increase in the Pacific Northwest's population between 1950 and 1970, again a rate double the nation's overall growth rate.⁸

The region's population growth and industrialization brought a concomitant increase in the demand for electricity. Pacific Northwest power usage increased 438 percent between 1940 and 1953 compared with a 212 percent increase in the United States as a whole. Department of the Interior projections for the region forecasted a huge increase in future electrical needs. The department expected a 300 percent increase in power needs for irrigation and a 520 percent increase in power needs for mining. In fact, the Pacific Northwest states needed eleven million kilowatt-hours of additional electricity between 1955 and 1963 just to meet minimum growth projections.⁹

7. Tininenko, "Middle Snake River," 13; Carlos A. Schwantes, The Pacific Northwest: An Interpretative History (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 339-340.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid; Tininenko, "Middle Snake River," 18-20; Mark J. Fitzgerald, "Power Struggle at Hells Canyon," America, 21 May 1955, 207-209.

Advocates of the Bureau of Reclamation plan maintained that only government development of Hells Canyon provided the planned, systematic development that the region needed to meet its electrical needs. Federal power stalwarts argued that American resource policy since the late nineteenth century, which expanded national control over natural resources, had been good for America and portended well for Hells Canyon.

Between 1879 and 1953, the national government gradually increased its purview over America's resources, especially water power resources. Before 1879, Americans plundered their natural assets as the emerging nation pushed across the continent. Americans clear-cut forests, pillaged streams, and killed thousands of animals. States exercised uncontested control over navigable waters inside their boundaries. The states largely regulated those water resources and maintained few controls to protect them from abuse. Consequently, the nation lost the benefit of many major water power assets.¹⁰

Conservationists encouraged the national government to address resource issues and conserve America's resources for use by future generations. Congress first considered the issue of hydroelectric development in 1879 when it authorized the secretary of war to lease mechanical power developed at a navigation dam on the Mississippi River. In the Rivers and Harbors Act of 1890, Congress prohibited dam construction in navigable waters without the secretary of war's consent. The General Dam Acts of 1906 and 1910 gave the War Department greater authority to regulate

10. Jerome Kerwin, Federal Water-Power Legislation (New York: Columbia University Press, 1926), 105-106.

private development of streams subject to federal jurisdiction. The 1910 act limited licenses granted by the secretary to a fifty-year term.¹¹

President Theodore Roosevelt, often regarded as America's greatest conservationist president, made resource concerns a principal political issue. Roosevelt presided over the passage of the Reclamation Act (1902), which provided for the reclamation and irrigation of arid lands in the West. His administration initiated twenty-five reclamation and irrigation projects and added 125 million acres to the national forests. Roosevelt also stressed that America must develop every stream to its full capacity and believed the nation should develop each river as a unit. He thought that water issues were America's most pivotal domestic issues.¹²

The seminal Federal Water Power Act, passed in 1920 after a fifteen-year fight in Congress, established the FPC and gave the commission the authority to grant licenses to states, municipalities, and private companies to construct dams on navigable waters. Section 7 of the act directed the FPC to deny applications for the development of any resource that the commission judged should be undertaken by the national government. The act directed the FPC to submit costs for developing these projects to Congress. Additionally, Section 10(a) of the Federal Power Act mandated that the commission license projects best adapted to a comprehensive plan of development. The commission's interpretation of Sections 7 and 10(a) became a crux of the Hells Canyon controversy.¹³

11. Ibid., 106, 112, 128-129; "Steps Taken by Congress," Congressional Digest, December 1955, 290; "Evolution of Power Policy," Congressional Digest, December 1955, 293-294.

12. Kerwin, Water-Power, 114-115, 153; "Steps," Congressional Digest, December 1955, 290.

13. Federal Water Power Act, Public Law 280, 66th Cong., 2d sess. (10 June 1920), 7, 10; Kerwin, Water-Power, 264-265.

Under the presidencies of Franklin D. Roosevelt and Harry Truman, the national government further extended its control over hydroelectric resources. The Tennessee Valley Authority Act of 1933 and the Bonneville Act of 1937 furthered the idea that comprehensive planning of major hydroelectric resources was a responsibility of the federal government.¹⁴ This planning method entailed simultaneously developing all of a river basin's resources so that the public gained their maximum benefit. Stalwarts of comprehensive planning argued that the national government must seek to develop a project's navigation and flood control potential in addition to its electric power capability. They pointed to the success of the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), which built dams that harnessed the hydroelectric potential of the Tennessee Valley. The TVA had a wide mandate for regional planning that authorized the agency to undertake economic development, recreation, reforestation, and power production.¹⁵

Roosevelt and Truman did not intend to socialize the power industry, as many conservatives claimed, but they did recognize that federal control of hydroelectric resources protected those assets from private exploitation. Further, construction of these developments provided jobs for unemployed workers, especially during the Great Depression. Under Roosevelt's National Industrial Recovery Act (NRA) of 1933, the

14. Gordon Clapp, The Tennessee Valley Authority (New York: Praeger, 1973), 195; A. L. Riesch Owen, Conservation Under FDR (New York: Praeger, 1983), 114-115, 153; Elmo Richardson, Dams, Parks, and Politics (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1973), 14-18.

15. John S. Willson, Philip Tabas, and Marian Henneman, Comprehensive Planning and the Environment (Cambridge, MA: Abt Books, 1979), 1-9; Owen, Conservation, 114-115.

U.S. government constructed large multiple-purpose structures, such as the Fort Peck Dam in California and the Grand Coulee Dam in Washington.¹⁶

The Truman administration continued to increase the national government's involvement in the development of hydroelectric resources. His administration made the expansion of regional hydroelectric projects a top domestic goal. A 1946 policy directive from Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes argued that the U.S. government had the responsibility to prevent private power monopolies and protect the interest of America's consumers. Truman and Ickes called for the creation of a Columbia Valley Authority (CVA) for the Pacific Northwest states, especially Washington. CVA supporters argued that the project would harness the electric potential of the Columbia River and reduce the potential for flooding. Truman's 1953 budget called for spending half the total allocated funds for water resources on multiple-purpose dam building. He supported the Reclamation Bureau's plan for Hells Canyon.¹⁷

The Eisenhower administration disagreed with Truman's action and tried to reduce federal hegemony over natural resources. Eisenhower and his team reversed the precedent of expanding federal control over hydroelectric resources and focused public attention on issues such as Hells Canyon.

16. Ibid., 167; Richardson, Dams, 10-14.

17. Richardson, Dams, 19, 20, 79; Secretary Ickes to Department of the Interior Personnel, Memorandum on Power Policy, 3 January 1946, Cabinet Meeting of 31 July 1953 folder, Box 2, Cabinet Series, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library.

CHAPTER 1

PARTNERSHIP AND WITHDRAWAL

Republicans, eager to recapture the White House after a twenty-year absence, nominated General Dwight D. Eisenhower as their 1952 presidential nominee. Most Republicans confidently predicted the popular World War II hero could bring them victory in the national election. Eisenhower was not the candidate of party conservatives, but his major campaign themes, namely the dangers of centralized government, the deleterious effects of government domination of the economy, and America's inadequate response to communism, were standard GOP issues. On other matters, Eisenhower pursued policies of the middle way, which he defined as between conservative Republicans on the right and New Deal Democrats on the left.¹

Concerning natural resource policy, Eisenhower campaigned on the middle way policy of partnership. The Republican nominee promised his partnership initiative gave local opinion a greater voice in resource decisions. Eisenhower based the partnership policy on his belief that Washington must undertake only those responsibilities that states cannot do for themselves.² Instead, his new policy abandoned America's tradition of

1. Gary W. Reichard, The Reaffirmation of Republicanism (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1975), 3-6.

2. Elmo Richardson, Dams, Parks, and Politics (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1973), 18, 74-75; Elmo Richardson, The Presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower (Lawrence: The Regents Press of Kansas, 1979), 48-49.

promoting an activist natural resource policy and led to the incomplete development of resources such as Hells Canyon. Further, the partnership initiative politicized decisions such as the Hells Canyon case and damaged the administration's goals.

Pacific Northwest Republicans urged Eisenhower to make resource issues a major theme of his campaign. Lieutenant Governor Robert Smylie of Idaho argued that centralized government authority, especially as embodied by some Department of the Interior policies, was an issue ripe for GOP exploitation. Smylie urged Eisenhower to seize on the issue but cautioned him to guard against Democratic attacks that the GOP harbored antipathy to federal development of natural assets. Eisenhower took Smylie's advice and frequently criticized Democratic resource policy, especially in the Pacific Northwest. The GOP nominee argued federal authorities had such a tight grip on hydroelectric power that the government did everything "but come in and wash the dishes for the housewife." Eisenhower told campaign audiences that federal bureaucrats in Washington had little understanding of the needs of America's local communities. They applied the same development methods to all resource projects whatever the situation. Eisenhower assured voters, however, that he believed the national government did have a role in developing resources and cited President Theodore Roosevelt as his role model.³

Other Republicans were more blunt in their criticisms of Democratic environmental policies. Senator Harry Cain, a Washington Republican, charged the

3. Campaign Statement at Sacramento, Dwight D. Eisenhower, 8 October 1952, Campaign Statements of Dwight D. Eisenhower folder, Box 8, Campaign Series, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library; Campaign Statement at Boise, Dwight D. Eisenhower, 20 August 1952, Campaign Statements of Dwight D. Eisenhower folder, Box 8, Campaign Series, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library; Richardson, Dams, 77-81.

Democrats had a Soviet-style scheme to usurp America's water resources one state at a time. He predicted they planned to begin with Hells Canyon. Senator Arthur Watkins of Utah routinely equated the Department of the Interior's policies with socialism, communism, and big brother. Resource issues were a major concern in the West in 1952. The party replaced the brief platitudes of their 1948 platform with passionate rhetoric in 1952. The GOP platform rejected socialistic valley authorities and advocated greater local participation in planning water projects.⁴

Adlai Stevenson, the Democratic presidential nominee, defended the national government's investment in the West's natural assets. Stevenson believed federal dam building and reclamation projects contributed to the region's good economic climate. He praised the efficiency of federal regional planning and endorsed the Bureau of Reclamation's plans for Hells Canyon. The Democratic nominee, however, inadvertently agreed with Eisenhower that the TVA was not a perfect model for all river basins and endorsed few specific new initiatives to continue Truman's policies. Stevenson had difficulty relating to voters in the region. Democrats wondered whether they could make him look or sound sufficiently "Western." They also doubted that he fully understood the importance of environmental issues in the region. In an untoward attempt to relate to Wyoming voters, Stevenson said he had seen the Continental Divide as a boy and fished

4. Ibid.; Republican National Committee Platform on Natural Resources, 1952, Republican National Committee Clippings and Publication File, Box 8, Campaign Series, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library.

the state's streams twenty years earlier. He barely responded, however, to the GOP criticisms of Democratic resource policy.⁵

President Truman, whose record was a major election issue, campaigned vigorously for Stevenson in the Pacific Northwest. The president enjoyed a good political fight and relished the opportunity to defend his administration's record on resource policy. He skewered Republicans who accused Democrats of socialistic proclivities. Truman attributed charges of socialism to business leaders, who he thought controlled the GOP. Although Truman took great care not to attack the popular Eisenhower personally, he told audiences in the Pacific Northwest that the general took orders from the private power lobby like a good soldier. The president asserted Democratic-sponsored dams, such as Grand Coulee in Washington and Tiber and Hungry Horse in Montana, improved the region's economic prospects and enhanced people's lives. The dams' low cost power attracted industry to the area, and the resulting new businesses provided jobs. Truman urged Pacific Northwest denizens to vote Democratic since Stevenson and congressional Democrats promised to continue building federal dams. Truman warned the region could forget future projects if the GOP took power because the Republicans "have always been against anything new, especially if it is for the benefit of the people."⁶

Voters seemingly preferred the affable Eisenhower's middle way. The Kansas-reared general overcame Democratic attacks and won every state in the West on his way

5. Adlai Stevenson, "The New West" and "The People's Natural Resources," in Major Campaign Speeches of Adlai E. Stevenson (New York: Random House, 1952), 72-78, 83-91.

6. Harry Truman, Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Harry Truman, 1945-1953, vol. 8 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1966), 344-345, 638-639, 644-647, 654-659, 664-665, 716-719.

to a seven million popular vote landslide over Stevenson. Republican wins in the congressional elections were less sweeping, but the GOP did elect nine new senators and fifty new House members.⁷ Republicans enjoyed majorities in the Congress, with a margin of 49 to 47 in the Senate and a slim 221 to 214 majority in the House of Representatives. Western voters split their tickets, especially on resource issues. Republican opponents of the Bureau of Reclamation's Hells Canyon structure such as Governor Arthur Langlie of Washington and Senator Watkins of Utah defeated their Democratic opponents. Democratic supporters of a federal Hells Canyon dam won several key races against dam foes. Idaho's Gracie Pfost won a House seat, Montana's Mike Mansfield won a Senate seat, and Representative Henry Jackson of Washington took Hugh Mitchell's Senate seat.⁸

The new president continued to emphasize the partnership policy in his 1953 State of the Union address. Eisenhower averred that his policy favored neither federal nor private power interests. He pledged partnership only represented a cooperative relationship between national, state, local, and private interests that reduced dependence on the federal government to develop natural resources. Eisenhower promised to support federal projects when he judged them necessary, but he argued such developments must be scaled back in face of the nation's \$5.9 billion budget deficit.⁹

7. Reichard, Reaffirmation, 14-27; Richardson, Eisenhower, 21-22.

8. Richardson, Dams, 77-81.

9. Dwight D. Eisenhower, Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1953-1961, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1960), 19-20, 26-27.

The Department of the Interior immediately began applying the tenets of partnership when officials drafted a new electric power policy statement to replace a 1946 directive prepared by Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes. The Ickes guidelines called for expanded federal government hegemony over water power resources. He further argued that the national government must ensure low cost power and prevent monopolization of the electric industry. Eisenhower's team developed some parts of its power policy after consulting with GOP leaders such as Governors Langlie of Washington, Len Jordan of Idaho, and Paul Patterson of Oregon. The administration decided that the national government must continue to build main-stem power plants on rivers such as the Columbia. The new power directive, however, permitted private development of hydroelectric plants on tributaries such as the Snake River, possibly allowing for Idaho Power's development of the Hells Canyon reach. Eisenhower's new policy averred that the responsibility of supplying electricity and building transmission lines was largely a local one. The Department of the Interior pledged not to oppose the development plans of any interest, either private or public, in harnessing the potential of power development sites. The department, in short, did not plan to file petitions blocking development plans as Truman's Department of the Interior had done.¹⁰

Partnership did not deter Senator Wayne Morse of Oregon from introducing a bill authorizing a Hells Canyon dam to be built by the Bureau of Reclamation. Morse, a

10. Secretary Ickes to Department of the Interior Personnel, Memorandum on Power Policy, 3 January 1946, Cabinet Meeting of 31 July 1953 folder, Box 2, Cabinet Series, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library; Minutes of Cabinet Meeting, 31 July 1953, Cabinet Meeting of 31 July 1953 folder, Box 2, Cabinet Series, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library; Department of the Interior Power Policy, 31 July 1953, Cabinet Meeting of 31 July 1953 folder, Box 2, Cabinet Series, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library.

liberal who had been elected as a Republican in 1944 and 1950, had little to gain by supporting Eisenhower. The maverick Oregon lawmaker left the GOP during the 1952 campaign and declared himself an Independent.¹¹ Morse thought the partnership policy was just more justification of his belief that Eisenhower was a puppet of GOP conservatives. On 16 April 1953, he and Representative Gracie Pfof, an Idaho Democrat, introduced legislation authorizing construction of a federal Hells Canyon dam. Morse and Pfof claimed their bill would protect state water rights, produce abundant electric power, and provide latent recreational benefits. They said that Idaho, which had the lowest per capita income of the Pacific Northwest states, desperately needed the federal dam's abundant electricity to attract industry and jobs to the state. Morse opined this purpose alone justified the legislation.¹²

Morse and Pfof attracted little GOP support for their bill. Only liberal North Dakota Republican William Langer cosponsored the measure. In contrast, Governor Jordan upbraided Pfof for introducing her "meddlesome" bill. Although the Eighty-third Congress (1953-1955) never took action on their proposal, Morse and Pfof gave federal power advocates something with which to oppose Idaho Power's plans for Hells Canyon.

11. Morse declared himself an Independent in the fall of 1952. He joined the Democratic Party and sought reelection as a Democrat in 1956.

12. A. Robert Smith, The Tiger in the Senate: The Biography of Wayne Morse (Garden City: Doubleday, 1962), 137-145; Wayne Morse, "My Personal Declaration of Independence," The New Republic, 6 July 1953, 13-14; Congressional Record, 83rd Cong., 2d sess., 1953, 99, pt. 3: 3205-3235; "Morse Lauds Introduction of Dam Bill," Idaho Evening Statesman, 17 April 1953, p. 13; "National Hells Canyon Bill Introduced by Gracie Pfof," Idaho Evening Statesman, 16 April 1953, p. 13.

Their legislation also was the basis of similar measures introduced in 1955, 1956, and 1957.¹³

Eisenhower appointed Douglas McKay, the Republican governor of Oregon, as the secretary of the interior. The unpretentious McKay was a fifty-nine year old descendent of Oregon pioneers who reminded voters he was just a humble Chevrolet dealer. McKay, the man most responsible for carrying out the partnership plan, soon applied the new policy to the Hells Canyon controversy. On 5 May 1953, the secretary withdrew Chapman's FPC objection that blocked Idaho Power's development of the canyon. Essentially, McKay's move meant the Department of the Interior no longer took a position on the Hells Canyon issue. Pacific Northwest Republicans such as Governors Langlie, Jordan, and Patterson praised McKay's decision as a victory for local control and limited government.¹⁴

Democrats quickly assailed McKay's move. His decision on Hells Canyon affirmed their worst fears and seemed to confirm their campaign charges of the previous year. Democratic National Committee chair Stephen Mitchell accused Eisenhower of presiding over a "giveaway government." Other Democrats predicted McKay's action ended any hope of a federal dam in Hells Canyon and retarded the national government's dam building program. Truman launched particularly caustic attacks against the Eisenhower regime, asserting that the administration's resource policy betrayed all

13. Congressional Record, 83rd Cong., 2d sess., 1953, 99, pt. 3: 3206; "Jordan Tells His Opposition on Proposal by Representative Pfost," Idaho Evening Statesman, 16 April 1953, p. 13.

14. Richardson, Dams, 83-85; "Oxbow Objections Dropped," Idaho Evening Statesman, 5 May 1953, p.1; Robert Lucas, "McKay Cancels Federal Policy on Public Power," Denver Post, 14 May 1953, p.1; "McKay Lauded, Rapped on Public Power Issue," Idaho Evening Statesman, 16 May 1953, p. 1.

Americans. The pugnacious former president urged federal power supporters to join the fight and save the national Hells Canyon dam. Morse accused the administration of bilking the nation and opined Eisenhower presided over a “hit and run Cadillac crusade” against natural resources. The senator predicted future treacheries on timber and land policy. McKay’s decision further justified the senator’s decision to bolt the GOP. An exasperated Pfoos told reporters that McKay’s decision potentially denied necessary electric power to the people of his native Oregon.¹⁵

For the first time in more than twenty years, the national government retreated from Theodore Roosevelt’s legacy. The new Washington leadership reduced government protection of a tremendous natural asset and appeared to ignore the benefits of Bureau of Reclamation control of Hells Canyon. Were Eisenhower and McKay really selling out to the private power lobby?

On 3 August 1953, Morse and Langer attempted to strike back by introducing Senate Bill 2590 to lessen the FPC’s authority. Their bill, which never reached the Senate floor, gave Congress rather than the FPC the authority to grant licenses for power development in river basins subject to national government jurisdiction. The lawmakers suggested their bill protected the nation’s hydroelectric assets and guarded the public interests.¹⁶

15. “Mitchell Upbraids GOP,” New York Times, 17 May 1953, p. 44; “Arkansas Plans Offshore Oil Suit,” New York Times, 7 May 1953, p. 16; “Truman Denounces GOP Defense Cuts and Domestic Aims,” New York Times, 8 September 1953, p. 20; “Morse Foresees Power Swindle,” New York Times, 13 June 1953, p. 9; “President Charts Success Formula,” New York Times, 12 July 1953, p. 46.

16. Congressional Record, 83rd Cong., 2d sess., 1953, 99, pt. 8: 10990.

America's press also harshly condemned McKay's move. Editors noted that McKay announced his decision the same day the Tidelands bill passed in the Senate. The Tidelands bill, which gave Gulf states ownership of the oil-rich submerged lands along their coastlines, gave them the opportunity of attacking a double giveaway. The Nation, a leading liberal journal, expressed outrage at the Hells Canyon decision but expected little more from a Republican White House. Other editorials compared Eisenhower's environmental policy with Herbert Hoover's and noted the GOP administration behaved just as the president's campaign portended. Even the reliably Republican Denver Post questioned the Hells Canyon decision and wondered if it presaged an end to comprehensive resource planning. Post editor Palmer Hoyt recommended that Eisenhower explain his position. Hoyt thought the White House was more concerned with a private corporation's interests rather than the public good. He also doubted the FPC had the authority needed to regulate sufficiently Idaho Power's development of the canyon.¹⁷ Hoyt's paper editorialized that Eisenhower and McKay failed their first major natural resource policy test and observed the decision posed political problems for the new Republican regime in the Pacific Northwest. The Post wanted the new president to

17. "Retreat at Hells Canyon," The Nation, 16 May 1953, 405; Wayne Morse, "The Progress of the Crusade," The New Republic, 31 August 1953, 15-16; Palmer Hoyt to Chief of Staff Sherman Adams, 25 May 1953, 155-E-8 Hells Canyon Dam (1) folder, Box 838, Official File 155-E-1 Series, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library.

be careful of private interests who wanted something from his presidency. Voters, the paper argued, frowned on politically motivated decisions.¹⁸

Administration officials expected the Hells Canyon dispute to produce controversy. McKay and Under Secretary of the Interior Ralph Tudor prepared a case study of the issue before they acted and cleared their withdrawal decision with the Cabinet. Although McKay himself predicted attacks from federal power advocates over the Hells Canyon matter, he thought the administration could justify its decision on the factual evidence. McKay believed the public supported allowing the nonpartisan, quasi-judicial FPC to decide the Hells Canyon case.¹⁹ After all, the voters seemingly endorsed less activist government in the 1952 elections. The secretary continued to insist his decision was not an endorsement of either federal or private development of the canyon. Instead, his action allowed the FPC to organize hearings on the case and hear testimony from Idaho Power and the National Hells Canyon Association, the parties most involved in the case. McKay reminded his critics that the commission had the legal authority to rule against Idaho Power's application and turn the matter over to Congress.²⁰

18. Robert Lucas, "Public or Private," Denver Post, 13 May 1953, p. 1; Robert Lucas, "McKay Cancels Federal Policy on Public Power," Denver Post, 14 May 1953, p. 1; Robert Lucas, "Great Dam Offers More Power than Private One," Denver Post, 15 May 1953, p. 1; Robert Lucas, "The Snake River Issue-Ike's Trial," Denver Post, 17 May 1953, p. 1; Robert Lucas, "Public-Private Venture May Solve Dispute," Denver Post, 18 May 1953, p. 1.

19. Minutes of Cabinet Meeting, 24 April 1953, Cabinet Meeting of 24 April 1953 folder, Box 2, Cabinet Series, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library; Press Secretary Murray Snyder to Idaho state senator Clark Hamilton, 15 June 1953, 155-E-8 Hells Canyon Dam (1) folder, Box 838, Official File 155-E-1 Series, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library; Under Secretary of the Interior Ralph A. Tudor to Federal Power Commissioner Jerome Kukendall, 16 July 1953, 155-E-8 Hells Canyon Dam (1) folder, Box 838, Official File 155-E-1 Series, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library.

20. "McKay Denies Favoritism," New York Times, 15 July 1953, p. 49.

Cabinet members urged McKay to stress Eisenhower's commitment to undertake worthy electric projects for America's citizens. The Cabinet suggested the administration must weather any political storm created by the Hells Canyon decision. Budget Director Joseph Dodge felt that the Democrats intended to attack any policy decision and urged McKay to stand his ground. Dodge suggested the administration use the budget crunch to its advantage. He thought the nation simply did not have the money to undertake all major natural resource projects. McKay confidently believed the administration correctly decided the Hells Canyon case. Tudor assured him the decision did not damage the administration in the Pacific Northwest and even showed McKay a poll that justified their faith. The survey showed that the American public was not interested in the power issue, and the Hells Canyon controversy delivered no votes to the GOP or the Democrats.²¹

Opponents quickly painted McKay as the bogeyman behind the partnership policy, and the secretary spent most of 1953 defending himself against those charges. Democrats labeled him "Giveaway McKay," but he rejected that characterization and argued any giveaway was really an administration plan to return resource decisions to the people. McKay assured the public the Department of the Interior planned to continue its program of public power and protection of the country's land. The secretary reminded his opponents that the Eisenhower administration supported local involvement in resource decisions and argued the Hells Canyon decision exemplified that practice.²²

21. Minutes of Cabinet Meeting, 24 April 1953, Cabinet Meeting of 24 April 1953 folder, Box 2, Cabinet Series, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library; Richardson, Dams, 120.

22. "Public Power Here to Stay Says McKay," New York Times, 15 May 1953, p. 33; "McKay Emphasizes U.S. Land Policy," New York Times, 3 November 1953, p. 25.

Although McKay wanted to defend his actions on the merits, his unguarded remarks did little to belie the giveaway label. The secretary made one such careless remark when he spoke to a business group in Portland, Oregon. McKay declared that the Eisenhower team “was here in the saddle as an administration representative of business and industry.” Critics panned the remarks and suggested he really intended to say the Republican White House “represented business and industry.” The secretary even once exhorted businesses to seek fair profits, leaving critics to wonder how much profit was fair. McKay even flubbed his announcement of the department’s withdrawal from the Hells Canyon case. Public power supporters disputed his claim that he did not personally favor either the Idaho Power or the Bureau of Reclamation plan and charged he made comments favorable to Idaho Power’s development proposal in a June speech in Portland. Although McKay initially denied the charges, he later admitted to saying that the Idaho Power plan was more economically feasible than the Bureau of Reclamation’s costs for the canyon. The secretary also inveighed against the TVA model of basin development and declared that federal government monopolies were the most menacing threat to American citizens.²³

Administration opponents directed most of their criticisms over the Hells Canyon decision at McKay, but Eisenhower approved the secretary’s decisions in the matter. The president ordered McKay to clear any dam or reclamation project decision with him personally before publicly announcing it. White House aides planned a confidential

23. Richardson, *Dams*, 116-117; “McKay Denies Favoritism,” *New York Times*, 15 July 1953, p. 49.

review of each such decision with the president, Budget Director Dodge, Attorney General Herbert Brownell, and White House aide Gabriel Hague participating. The Hells Canyon decision went through this critical process. Eisenhower wanted his staff to consider how each policy decision influenced public opinion and affected the government's budget deficit.²⁴

Eisenhower defended McKay's decision by declaring that his administration did not support any agency or governmental entity having complete domain over natural resources. The president reiterated that he supported giving maximum influence, authority, and direction to local public opinion in developing hydroelectric resources. Eisenhower, however, was not above making careless public statements himself. He stated that he and McKay favored local interests deciding the Hells Canyon development case, but he added local interests favored Idaho Power's plans for the project. The president perpetuated fears he presided over a government that had little concern for resource policies. In a June speech, Eisenhower mused that he wanted to turn back twenty years of "creeping socialism" in the United States. When pressed by reporters to give an example of American socialism, the president mentioned the TVA. He assured the press corps he had no intention of destroying the TVA, but he privately spoke of his desire to sell the agency.²⁵

24. President Eisenhower to Secretary of the Interior McKay, 25 February 1953, Douglas McKay (1) folder, Box 26, Administration Series, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library; Secretary of the Interior McKay to President Eisenhower, 2 March 1953, Douglas McKay (1) folder, Box 26, Administration Series, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library.

25. Eisenhower, Public Papers, 1: 286-287, 432-434; Emmet J. Hughes, The Ordeal of Power: A Political Memoir of the Eisenhower Years (New York: Atheneum, 1963), 152.

The Eisenhower White House learned little from the Hells Canyon case. Through its actions, the administration continued to lend credibility to the giveaway charges. Soon the administration became embroiled in the Dixon-Yates case, which federal power advocates charged could have destroyed the TVA.²⁶ Eisenhower and McKay plowed ahead with their partnership initiative in this project and in other power disputes involving Niagara Falls, the Upper Colorado Basin, and the John Day Dam. Despite this controversy, Eisenhower told Congress in 1956 that partnership was a success.²⁷

More than anything, the Hells Canyon decision raised the ire of public power supporters and congressional Democrats. These two groups assiduously fought for five years to prevent the Idaho Power Company's development of Hells Canyon. Their diligence kept the issue before the public and politically wounded the administration, although the charges never seemed to hurt Eisenhower. The Hells Canyon decision also cost McKay. The secretary left the administration early in 1956 to pursue a Senate race against Wayne Morse. Morse successfully raised the issue in their Oregon race and defeated the secretary by an impressive margin.

26. Private utility presidents Edgar Dixon and Eugene Yates organized a cartel of electric companies to build a power plant in West Memphis, Arkansas, that would sell electricity to government installations that drew their power from the TVA. Their plan became a scandal, however, when opponents learned that the Bureau of the Budget official who drafted the plan was also an executive of First Boston Corporation, a key financial backer of the project.

27. Eisenhower, Public Papers, 4: 18-19.

CHAPTER 2

FALLOUT FROM THE HELLS CANYON DECISION

The Eisenhower administration's decision to withdraw government opposition to the Idaho Power Company's development of Hells Canyon did not end the controversy over the gorge. Instead, Hells Canyon remained a political issue throughout 1954 and 1955. Public power proponents still fervently championed a single, federally-sponsored high dam in the canyon while private power advocates called for the three-dam Idaho Power proposal. Democrats pointed to the administration's withdrawal decision as proof that the GOP wanted to cede control of natural resources to private enterprise. Such Democratic attacks on the president's environmental policies damaged Republicans and contributed to GOP losses in the 1954 congressional elections.

Eisenhower and his aides thought Federal Power Commission (FPC) hearings on the issue would end the dispute, but they underestimated the resolve of national power stalwarts. Public power proponents sought to convince both Congress and the FPC that only Bureau of Reclamation development of Hells Canyon ensured the most efficient use of the canyon's natural resource potential. They argued that the president's partnership policy, the White House's initiative to share the responsibility of developing hydroelectric sites with private enterprise, should not apply to Hells Canyon.

The FPC disagreed, however, and eventually endorsed Idaho Power's proposed development of the gorge. This decision contributed to the incomplete utilization of

Hells Canyon and allowed Idaho Power to begin constructing three small dams that provided far less power and flood control than the U.S. government proposal promised.

Leading Republicans warned the White House that the administration's natural asset policy politically damaged the GOP. Eisenhower's partnership initiative especially concerned voters in the Pacific Northwest, an area accustomed to benefiting from national government hydroelectric projects. Wendell Wyatt, the Oregon GOP chair, warned fellow Republicans that voters in his region associated federal power projects with job creation and economic prosperity. He contended that the changes in the nation's power program portended GOP electoral defeats in 1954 and 1956. An economic downturn in the Pacific Northwest during 1953 and 1954 only seemed to confirm voters' fears that the administration's environmental policies hurt the region. Even the reliably Republican Denver Post wondered if Secretary of the Interior Douglas McKay had declared "War on the West."¹

Public opinion seemed to confirm that Americans believed Democratic charges about Eisenhower's "giveaway government." Letters protesting the administration's decision to withdraw from the Hells Canyon case poured into the White House during 1953 and 1954. Correspondence ran ten to one against the withdrawal decision, and a majority of writers from no region of the country supported the administration's position. Although most of the letters came from Oregon, Idaho, and Washington, Americans from

1. Elmo Richardson, Dams, Parks, and Politics (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1973), 153-155; Elmo Richardson, The Presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower (Lawrence: The Regents Press of Kansas, 1979), 48-49.

all parts of the country expressed their outrage over the Hells Canyon decision. Many of these concerned citizens urged the president to replace McKay with someone more solicitous of the public interest. In an ironic twist, most correspondents believed that local opinion favored Bureau of Reclamation development of the gorge. Eisenhower and McKay, who called for greater local involvement in resource development, openly posited that Pacific Northwest citizens preferred Idaho Power's plan. The evidence did not seem to justify their conclusion.²

Farm and labor groups, such as the Grange and the Farmers Union, expressed the most pointed opposition to the administration's withdrawal decision. These groups argued that federal dam building benefited the Pacific Northwest's economy and generated cheap electric power the region needed to support healthy economic growth. Members of the Washington State Grange, the Oregon State Farmers Union, and the Oregon State Grange even challenged the president to visit Hells Canyon and told Eisenhower that seeing the magnificent damsite for himself would change his position. The White House responded that the president was too busy to visit the gorge and asserted that the matter received a fair hearing in Cabinet meetings. Eisenhower and his aides assured the groups that the FPC would decide the Hells Canyon case impartially. Further, the administration believed the commission's decision would close the matter.³

2. Author's analysis of correspondence to White House, March 1953-July 1956, Hells Canyon Dam (1) folder, Box 1384, Alphabetical Files Series, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library; Dwight D. Eisenhower, Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1953-1961, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1960), 286-287.

3. Correspondence, farm and labor leaders to President Eisenhower, 1953, 155-E-8 Hells Canyon Dam (1) folder, Box 838, Official File 155-E-1 Series, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library.

Democrats seized on voters' concerns about GOP resource policies. Stephen Mitchell, the Democratic National Committee chair, toured the Pacific Northwest to draw attention to Republican environmental failures. The Democratic leader drew sharp distinctions between Democratic accomplishments, such as the Washington's Grand Coulee Dam, and Republican-generated debacles, such as the Hells Canyon case. He gleefully quoted Denver Post editorials critical of the administration and told voters that McKay and Eisenhower callously ignored the public's best interests. Mitchell accused the GOP administration of kowtowing to business wishes and declared that the administration regularly celebrated "bank night at the Department of the Interior."⁴

The most successful Democratic exploitation of voters' concerns over GOP resource policies came in Richard Neuberger's challenge to incumbent Republican Senator Guy Cordon in Oregon. Neuberger, a prolific defender of federal hydroelectric projects, reminded voters that Cordon was a leading architect of GOP environmental initiatives. Further, the senator recommended the unpopular McKay to head the Department of the Interior. Neuberger claimed Cordon was partly responsible for the administration's resource policies, which he labeled the "McKay-Cordon giveaways."⁵

Neuberger, in contrast, passionately defended a national Hells Canyon dam in a series of New Republic essays on the dispute. The candidate, twenty-two years younger

4. Richardson, Dams, 154; "Power Issue Stirs Idaho's Elections," New York Times, 5 September 1954, p. 32.

5. Richardson, Dams, 154-160; A. Robert Smith, The Tiger in the Senate: The Biography of Wayne Morse (Garden City: Doubleday, 1962), 297-313.

than Cordon, was one of the West's most recognized authorities on political and resource issues. Defeating Cordon and replacing him with an unabashed advocate of federal control of natural assets would be a severe blow to the administration.

Democrats made the Neuberger-Cordon contest a referendum on White House resource policy, and leading Democrats campaigned assiduously for Neuberger. Adlai Stevenson, the 1952 Democratic presidential nominee, observed that his loss to Eisenhower was not a license for Republicans to surrender Hells Canyon and other natural resources to private interests. Stevenson argued that McKay and Cordon betrayed the West with a myopic power policy. He maintained that Republicans failed to consider the effects of their power policies on the public or future generations. Oscar Chapman, President Truman's Secretary of the Interior, presented a similar message to Western voters. The former secretary asserted that Eisenhower's partnership initiative and McKay's decision to withdraw from the Hells Canyon case exemplified the administration's pattern of disappointing the West. Stevenson and Chapman believed voters should give Democrats control of Congress to ensure a return to sound resource use and a continuation of national dam building.⁶

Eisenhower and his aides took a nonchalant approach to the criticisms. McKay and Ralph Tudor, Under Secretary of the Interior, believed that federal versus private power was not a leading political issue in the Pacific Northwest. McKay assured the

6. "GOP Policy Called Betrayal of West," New York Times, 10 October 1954, p. 70; "Stevenson Scores GOP Power Policy," New York Times, 16 October 1954, p. 1; "Northwest Split on Power Policy," New York Times, 14 November 1954, p. 71.

president that public power “demagogues” could not overcome the rightness of the administration’s policies. The president accepted their advice, and the GOP did not present a strong defense against the Democratic attacks. In fact, Eisenhower waited until late September to campaign for the embattled Cordon. He extolled the successes of his own partnership initiative and warned voters to fear federal, not private, power monopolies. Eisenhower credited Cordon with being a leader in the movement to give local opinion more authority on environmental issues. The president said that he needed the senator in Washington for another term.⁷

Voters registered a split verdict in contests where power, specifically the Hells Canyon development, was an issue. Oregon voters gave Neuberger a 2,462-vote victory over Cordon, but they reelected Republican Representatives Sam Coon and Harris Ellsworth, both opponents of the single Hells Canyon structure. Coon beat back an especially fierce challenge from Al Ullman, an outspoken critic of both McKay and Idaho Power. Idaho voters elected gubernatorial candidate Robert Smylie and Senator Henry Dworshak, GOP opponents of the high dam, while the Hells Canyon region itself reelected Representative Gracie Pfost. The Democrat earned the apt nickname “Hell’s Belle” because of her ardent support of a Bureau of Reclamation dam.⁸

Buoyed by the victories of Neuberger and twenty-one new House members, Democrats reclaimed control of Congress after two years as the minority party. In the

7. Richardson, Dams, 158-159; Eisenhower, Public Papers, 2: 855-865.

8. Richardson, Dams, 160-165; “Northwest Split on Power Policy,” New York Times, 14 November 1954, p. 71.

Eighty-fourth Congress, Democrats outnumbered Republicans 232 to 203 in the House and 49 to 47 in the Senate. The opposition party viewed its victories as a repudiation of Eisenhower's environmental policies. Key Democrats urged the president to support a Bureau of Reclamation project in Hells Canyon, but the president refused and pledged to continue his partnership initiative. The White House refused to believe its environmental policies damaged the GOP in the 1954 elections. Administration officials justified their assessment based on the results of a study commissioned by a group of Pacific Northwest Republicans. The report found no evidence to link the White House's resource policies and GOP political defeats. Republican leaders instead credited organized labor's support of the Democrats as the true explanation of GOP losses.⁹

Administration officials eagerly turned the Hells Canyon case over to the FPC. The five-member commission, operating under the authority of the Federal Power Act, determined whether Idaho Power's Hells Canyon project utilized the gorge's full resource potential. The FPC had the authority to reject the company's plans and recommend that Congress fund public development of the canyon. In short, the FPC could essentially reverse the administration's decision in the Hells Canyon matter.¹⁰

With no formal government opposition to private development of the gorge, McKay saw few obstacles to Idaho Power's plans for the canyon. The secretary,

9. James C. Foster, "1954: A CIO Victory?," *Labor History* 12 (1971): 392-408; Senators Murray, Morse, Mansfield, Neuberger, Magnuson, and Jackson to President Eisenhower, 30 December 1954, 155-E-8 Hells Canyon Dam (1) folder, Official File 155-E-1 Series, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library.

10. Federal Water Power Act, Public Law 280, 66th Cong., 2d sess. (10 June 1920), 7, 10; Jerome Kerwin, Federal Water-Power Legislation (New York: Columbia University Press, 1926), 264-265.

however, underestimated the resolve of public power stalwarts who supported a public Hells Canyon dam. Public power proponents formed the National Hells Canyon Association (NHCA) to oppose Idaho Power's designs on Hells Canyon. The NHCA, an amalgamation of farm and labor groups, public power associations, and rural electric cooperatives, received permission to intervene in FPC hearings on the Hells Canyon matter. NHCA officials saw their participation in the hearings as an opportunity to undermine Idaho Power's case.¹¹

FPC hearings on the Hells Canyon issue, which began on 7 July 1953, became the longest power hearings in the commission's history. Idaho Power and NHCA officials both tried to convince the FPC of the superiority of their proposals. Association officials believed that only the 722-foot high federally-sponsored Hells Canyon edifice ensured the best use of the middle Snake River. The NHCA pointed to the 300 thousand kilowatt difference in prime power production, the electricity dependably generated at the lowest water levels on record, between the two plans. NHCA estimates projected that the Bureau of Reclamation structure would generate 1.2 million kilowatts of prime power while the private proposal could generate only 900 thousand kilowatts. Here, federal power supporters argued that the idea of comprehensive planning heavily favored the single dam. In times of low water levels, the federal project could release more water to aid in power production at four downstream sites planned for Ice Harbor, Lower

11. Report, "Hells Canyon: A National Issue," April 1955, 155-E-8 Hells Canyon Dam (1) folder, Box 838, Official File 155-E-1 Series, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library; Federal Power Commission, Project Nos. 1971, 2132, and 2133: Idaho Power Company, 14 FPC 57.

Monumental, Little Goose, and Lower Granite. A Bureau of Reclamation dam, therefore, complemented national development at these four sites.¹² The superior water storage at the federal dam resulted in an additional three hundred thousand kilowatts of electricity for the Pacific Northwest's power grid.¹³

Idaho Power noted that Congress had yet to appropriate money for the other four edifices. The company pointed to the initial installed capacity, the power generated when the structure first began operation, as the best measure of the electricity produced. Using this measure, the three private dams together would produce 783,400 kilowatts, a mere 16,600 kilowatts less than the single structure's 800,000. Idaho Power argued that the additional electricity did not justify spending \$560 million in taxpayer money. Further, the Pacific Northwest could not wait for Bureau of Reclamation development. The bureau needed six to ten years to construct the single dam while Idaho Power required just three years to complete its Hells Canyon project. Regional studies predicted that the Pacific Northwest needed the additional power by 1962 just to meet conservative growth projections. Pacific Northwest citizens simply could not wait for Washington to take

12. In the late 1940s, the Bureau of Reclamation and the Army Corps of Engineers recommended these dams for the lower Snake River. The federal government finally built all four dams between 1962 and 1975.

13. Report, "Hells Canyon Summary," May 1957, Hells Canyon folder, Box 2, Fred Seaton Papers, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library; Federal Power Commission, 14 FPC 57-59; Keith C. Peterson and Mary E. Reed, Controversy, Conflict, and Compromise: A History of the Lower Snake River Development (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1994), 89-107.

action when Idaho Power assured the region that it could harness the Snake's hydroelectric potential.¹⁴

The two sides also wrangled over the flood control promised by the two competing proposals. Few Pacific Northwest denizens denied the region needed additional safeguards to prevent the destructive Columbia River floods. Great deluges, such as the floods of 1894 and 1948, killed scores of the region's residents and caused millions of dollars in property losses. Federal power advocates estimated that their dam would create a ninety-two-mile long reservoir that provided 3.9 million acre-feet in flood control storage.¹⁵

Although it acknowledged the need for additional storage along the Snake River, Idaho Power argued that its plan better conformed to the Army Corps of Engineers Main Flood Control Plan for the Columbia River. The Corps found the Snake River, the Columbia's largest tributary, had the best flood control of any river in the Columbia River system. Idaho Power noted that the Corps projected the Snake needed only 2.3 million acre-feet in additional storage. The company's three dams would create a twenty-three-mile long reservoir with 1.1 million acre-feet of flood control storage. The additional 1.2 million acre-feet could be found at sites above Hells Canyon. These additional sites

14. Report, "Hells Canyon Summary;" Report, "Hells Canyon: A National Issue;" Federal Power Commission, 14 FPC 57-59.

15. Federal Power Commission, 14 FPC 60-62, Report, "Hells Canyon Summary."

could also contribute water for irrigation purposes. Hells Canyon, far above any productive farmland, could not irrigate a single acre of crops.¹⁶

Cost, however, was the most contentious issue in the Hells Canyon hearings. Although the national proposal would cost American taxpayers \$560 million, the NHCA testified that the single dam's cheap power justified the additional cost. The federal structure could produce electricity for 2.71 mills per kilowatt hour compared with Idaho Power's rates of 7.6 mills. Association attorneys contended that the Pacific Northwest's farmers and industries needed the cheap power. The NHCA pointed to the success of the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) as proof that comprehensive development could spur economic growth in a region. In 1933, the year Congress authorized the TVA, the seven Tennessee Valley states paid 3.4 percent of the nation's income taxes. In 1953, twenty years after TVA, the same seven states contributed 6.1 percent of America's tax revenue. Public electric advocates maintained inexpensive power could also benefit Idaho, Oregon, and Washington.¹⁷

Idaho Power reminded the commission that none of the \$133 million cost of their plan came from the federal treasury. The company admitted its power cost more than subsidized national power but told critics it would pay \$9.7 million in taxes from

16. Ibid.

17. Robert Tabor Averitt, "The Hells Canyon Controversy," (master's thesis, The University of Texas at Austin, 1957), 43-49; Federal Power Commission, 14 FPC 58-59; Report, "Hells Canyon Summary."

projected Hells Canyon electric revenues. These tax revenues benefited national, state, and local governments. The government's structure, in contrast, would pay no taxes.¹⁸

The FPC hearings ended on 9 July 1954 after more than one year of testimony. On 24 November 1954, John C. Mason, the commission's acting director of Hydroelectric and Licensed Projects, released an opinion favoring Idaho Power's plan. Mason praised the low cost of the private company's proposal and noted it required no taxpayer money. William J. Costello, the FPC examiner in the Hells Canyon case, echoed Mason's views in a statement released on 6 May 1955. Costello urged the commission to award Idaho Power a license to go forward with its project. Both men stressed that the Pacific Northwest needed the additional electricity and flood control the private company's plans would produce. The already overextended federal treasury could not afford to finance public development.¹⁹

Although Mason and Costello did not have the final word in the Hells Canyon dispute, their statements carried considerable influence with the FPC. On 4 August 1955, the full commission formally awarded Idaho Power a fifty-year lease to build and operate three small dams in the gorge. The commission elucidated its decision in a lengthy opinion that argued private development better conformed to comprehensive use of the Snake River. Idaho Power's proposal, in the commission's judgment, would provide flood control, recreation, and navigation benefits that would equal or exceed the Bureau

18. Ibid.

19. "Idaho Power Gets Federal Support," New York Times, 25 November 1954, p. 31; "FPC Aide Backs Idaho Power Dam," New York Times, 7 May 1955.

of Reclamation's single structure. The FPC opinion declared the private development had a higher costs to benefits ratio than the national proposal. Commissioners reasoned that the private dams cost less per kilowatt generated than the single dam. In sum, the additional power produced by the federal dam did not justify the \$427 million extra cost. The FPC acknowledged that Idaho Power electricity cost more to consumers than government power, but the commission's interpretation of the Federal Power Act eliminated cost to consumers as an issue. Commission members argued that they could not rule in favor of a project simply because it offered customers a lower cost.²⁰

Newspaper and magazine editorials blasted the FPC's decision. The New York Times opined that a piecemeal development of Hells Canyon by Idaho Power precluded true comprehensive development of the region. Sound development of the resource, embodied by Roosevelt and Truman policies, portended well for the entire nation. Anything that promised fewer benefits than the Bureau of Reclamation dam signaled a dangerous turn in American environmental policies. An Idaho newspaper took a similar position. The Lewiston Morning Tribune encouraged federal power supporters to head for court to save the canyon. Editors warned that the Hells Canyon decision smacked of partisanship. Democrats favored the federal plan, but most in the GOP opposed it. Further, GOP-controlled entities made all the decisions against Bureau of Reclamation control. The Republican administration withdrew from the case, and the GOP-dominated

20. "Utility is Victor on Hells Canyon," New York Times, 5 August 1955, p. 1; "Idaho Power Gets Hells Canyon Damsite," Lewiston Morning Tribune, 5 August 1955, p. 1; Federal Power Commission, 14 FPC 59, 63, 67, 69, 79.

FPC ruled against public development. The Morning Tribune argued that resource issues had rarely been so blatantly partisan in the nation's history. Democrats seemed unable to move the project in the current Congress. There seemed little hope for national control of Hells Canyon.²¹

Idaho Power officials felt vindicated by the FPC's ruling. T. E. Roach, the company's president, extolled the commission's decision and promised to begin construction before the end of the year. Roach believed the ruling especially benefited Idaho Power's customers and the entire Pacific Northwest region. Other high-dam opponents also celebrated the decision. Governor Robert Smylie, an Idaho Republican, and Earl Murphy, an officer of the State Chamber of Commerce, thought the commission's decision finally allowed Idaho to take control of her own natural resources. Less activist government seemed to rule the day. Perhaps no one enjoyed the decision more than McKay, who public power supporters branded "Giveaway McKay" in response to his controversial decision to withdraw from the Hells Canyon case. The secretary predicted that the FPC's decision ended the controversy over the canyon's development, but he again underestimated the determination of national power stalwarts. Republicans argued that the FPC was better able to decide the Hells Canyon matter than Congress. Congressional representatives did not have the time to weigh the merits of each case as

21. "Hells Canyon," New York Times, 28 July 1955, p. 22; "The Hells Canyon Dams," New York Times, p. 20; "A Battle Has Been Lost But Not the War," Lewiston Morning Tribune, 6 August 1955, p. 4; "Undermining Public Power," The New Republic, 17 May 1954, 5; Edgar Kemley, "Hells Canyon: Where are the Democrats,?" The Nation, 30 July 1955, 94-95.

the commission did nor were they detached from the case.²²

Congressional Democrats revived the issue and pledged to continue the Hells Canyon battle in Congress. They gleefully linked the commission's ruling with Republican politics and observed that GOP presidents appointed all five FPC members. Democrats believed the FPC simply followed standard Republican philosophy. Neuberger tied the decision to the administration's private power favoritism. The freshman senator reasoned that McKay and Eisenhower wanted to rob the Pacific Northwest of its leading asset, cheap power, and turn it over to their friends in industry. Democratic Senators Wayne Morse of Oregon and Estes Kefauver of Tennessee called the commission's ruling a betrayal. The Oregon senator scored the FPC for approving a project that did not develop the maximum amount of electric power. He declared the Pacific Northwest needed the additional power that Bureau of Reclamation development promised. Kefauver accused the FPC of making a politically motivated decision and charged the ruling was another Republican "deception."²³

Morse had already begun the fight. On 8 March 1955, well before the formal FPC ruling, the senator introduced legislation calling for a single Hells Canyon dam. His

22. "FPC Decision on Dam Blasted and Hailed in Idaho's Reaction," Idaho Evening Statesman, 5 August 1955, p. 2; "McKay Lauds Hells Canyon Dam Decision," Idaho Evening Statesman, 5 August 1955, p. 2; "Controversy Far From Settled, Dworshak Says in Comment," Idaho Evening Statesman, 5 August 1955, p. 3.

23. "Backers of High Federal Dam Plan to Fight," Idaho Evening Statesman, 5 August 1955, p. 1; "Kefauver Hits Dam Decision," Idaho Evening Statesman, 6 August 1955, p. 1; "Hells Canyon Issue Revived by Senators," Idaho Evening Statesman, 8 August 1955, p. 10; "Power Commission Is Assailed by Oregon's Senator Morse For Decision on Hells Canyon," Idaho Evening Statesman, 15 August 1955, p. 3.

legislation, Senate Bill 1333, attracted twenty-nine cosponsors from twenty states. All of the senator's cosponsors were Democrats except Senators William Langer and Milton Young, both North Dakota Republicans. Morse's legislation mirrored a bill that he introduced in 1953 to fund a national structure in the canyon. He appealed to America's twentieth century tradition of conservation and reminded his Republican colleagues that GOP President Theodore Roosevelt recognized the importance of water fifty years earlier when he supported the Reclamation Act of 1902.²⁴

Opponents immediately attacked the Morse bill. Senator Henry Dworshak, an Idaho Republican, questioned Morse why the Democrats did not support a Bureau of Reclamation project for the canyon during the twenty years they had control of Congress and the White House. Dworshak wondered whether Morse wanted full development of the Snake River or if he wanted to keep the issue before the public for another session of Congress. The Idaho senator noted Congress twice had rejected a federal Hells Canyon dam. Roach also condemned the Oregon solon's motives. The Idaho Power chief believed that Democrats would go to any lengths to intimidate the FPC and preclude private power development of the Snake River.²⁵

The Department of the Interior, stung by GOP defeats in the previous election, swung into action to defend its power program. The administration took a more active

24. Congressional Record, 84th Cong., 1st sess., 1954, 101, pt. 2: 2477-2508; "High Dam Measures Submitted," Idaho Evening Statesman, 8 March 1955, p. 1; "Hells Canyon Bill Submitted," Lewiston Morning Tribune, 9 March 1955, p. 1.

25. Congressional Record, 84th Cong., 1st sess., 1954, 101, pt 2: 2506-2508; "Senator Dworshak Stand on Dam Hit by Morse," Idaho Evening Statesman, 12 March 1955, p. 3.

approach to defending its partnership initiative. Under Secretary of the Interior Ralph Tudor prepared a lengthy study of Morse's bill. Tudor contended that the FPC had jurisdiction in the Hells Canyon dispute. Senate Bill 1333, in his opinion, violated the spirit of the Federal Power Act because it refused to honor the FPC's decision in the Hells Canyon matter. Further, the national government could not afford the additional \$2.1 billion to finance construction of other damsites along the Snake River necessary to achieve the government structure's full benefits.²⁶

The Eisenhower administration and the FPC endorsed less than full development of Hells Canyon. In authorizing a hydroelectric project that promised less flood control and power than a federal structure, both entities abandoned the ideas of comprehensive planning and maximum resource use. The commission and the administration neglected their duties to serve the public interest. They failed to consider the uniqueness of Hells Canyon and denied the people of Idaho and Oregon the benefits of cheap electricity generated at America's last great damsite. Such cheap electricity could have attracted additional jobs and industry to the Pacific Northwest.

Public power champions saw Congress as their last chance to realize federal development of the Snake River. The legislative branch, therefore, became the final battleground in the Hells Canyon dispute. National power advocates had a committed

26. Clarence A. Davis to General Persons, 3 June 1955, 155-E-8 Hells Canyon Dam (1) folder, Box 838, Official File 155-E-1 Series, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library; Notes, Ralph Tudor's Evaluation of Senate Bill 1333, April 1955, 155-E-8 Hells Canyon Dam (1) folder, Box 838, Official File 155-E-1 Series, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library.

team of lawmakers fighting for their cause. Would dam opponents fight as hard to defend Idaho Power?

The protracted dispute also continued to damage the Eisenhower administration politically. The Hells Canyon debate scarred the GOP in 1954, but White House aides refused to see the electoral damage of their position on Hells Canyon. The issue would affect the 1956 elections, especially a Senate race in Oregon between Morse and McKay, the two titans of the dispute.

CHAPTER 3

HELLS CANYON IN CONGRESS, THE FEDERAL COURTS, AND THE COURT OF PUBLIC OPINION

Despite the Federal Power Commission's (FPC) decision to license private development of Hells Canyon, public power advocates refused to concede defeat. Led by the National Hells Canyon Association (NHCA), they challenged the FPC's ruling in federal court, and their Democratic allies in Congress pressed for the construction of a single, high Bureau of Reclamation Dam. Although both attempts to overturn the commission's judgment failed, the issue remained before American voters for another year. Democrats used this election year opportunity to attack President Dwight D. Eisenhower's resource policies. The opposition party argued that the White House's handling of the Hells Canyon matter was indicative of a larger Republican program to surrender America's greatest natural assets to private enterprise. Democrats maintained that such a policy ignored the best interests of Americans and led to the incomplete use of environmental assets. These charges damaged GOP congressional candidates in the 1956 elections, especially those in the Pacific Northwest, and led to Republican electoral losses in Oregon, Idaho, and Washington.

Only eleven days after the FPC licensed Idaho Power's three-dam Hells Canyon project, the NHCA decided to challenge the decision in the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit. Appearing before a three-judge panel on 15

May 1956, the organization's attorneys asked the court to set aside the commission's judgment and void Idaho Power's licenses for the damsite. In the association's opinion, the FPC violated the Federal Power Act in approving the company's development proposal. NHCA attorneys believed that the act compelled the FPC only to approve plans ensuring the best comprehensive development of the gorge; otherwise, the commission must reject the proposal and submit project plans to Congress. In the association's view, the company's proposal fell far short of guaranteeing full resource use. The organization pointed out that Idaho Power's Hells Canyon project would provide less flood control and generate less electricity than public plans promised. Only the single structure yielded the best comprehensive development of Hells Canyon. Thus, the NHCA contended that the FPC should have rejected the private company's plan and endorsed national development. The commission's failure to do so went beyond the limits of its authority and represented an act of "administrative lawlessness."¹

The appeals court rejected the NHCA's arguments and refused to cancel the company's FPC licenses. A three-judge panel found that the commission did not violate its statutory duty. Judge Wilbur K. Miller, who authored the court's opinion in the case, elucidated the panel's disagreements with the NHCA's interpretation of the Federal Power Act. Miller and his fellow judges based their ruling on Section 7(b) of the law. This provision of the act directed the FPC to reject any hydroelectric project that

1. National Hells Canyon Association (NHCA) v. Federal Power Commission (FPC), 237 U.S. 777 (1956); "Hells Canyon Group Plans Fight in Court," Idaho Evening Statesman, 16 August 1955, p. 5; "Hells Canyon Fight Pushed," New York Times, 7 February 1956, p. 22; "Idaho Plan Opposed," New York Times, 13 March 1956, p. 5.

would be better undertaken by the central government. By choosing not to exercise this provision in the Hells Canyon case, the commission examined only one proposal for the damsite, the plan presented by Idaho Power. Thus, the superlative phrase “best comprehensive development” did not apply to the Hells Canyon issue. The commission, therefore, was only responsible for determining whether Idaho Power’s plan assured comprehensive development. Miller and his colleagues stressed their unwillingness to overturn the commission’s decision. The judges also assailed the NHCA for accusing the FPC of neglecting its duty. Miller reminded the association that the commission had the authority to reject federal hydroelectric control if it so decided. Idaho Power, in the commission’s estimation, seemed willing to develop the damsite, and the commission determined that a federal structure provided few benefits beyond the private plan. Further, the commission’s yearlong hearing in the Hells Canyon case hardly suggested the body took its regulatory authority lightly.²

On 16 November 1956, the court rejected the NHCA’s petition for another rehearing in the matter. The judges observed the association had failed to persuade the court and the FPC that only the national government could effectively develop Hells Canyon. With no new evidence to buttress their case, the NHCA had little hope of reversing the court’s decision. The judges argued that their decision followed the Supreme Court’s example in a similar case, Chapman v. Federal Power Commission. In

2. NHCA v. FPC, 777-785; Federal Power Commission, Project Nos. 1971, 2132, and 2133: Idaho Power Company, 14 FPC 57; Federal Water Power Act, Public Law 280, 66th Cong., 2d sess. (10 June 1920), 7, 10.

the Chapman case, as with Hells Canyon, the judiciary seemed to reject the arguments of public power proponents.³

Democrats, however, favored public financing of a single Hells Canyon dam. Party leaders believed they could use resource issues to their political benefit as they had done in 1954. That year's attacks on GOP environmental policy aided the Democrats in retaking control of Congress and helped elect Hells Canyon defenders such as Richard Neuberger, Oregon's junior senator. Paul Butler, Democratic National Committee chair, advised his party's congressional leaders to make federal control of Hells Canyon a legislative priority in 1956. In a letter to Speaker of the House Sam Rayburn and Senate Majority Leader Lyndon Johnson, both Texas Democrats, Butler argued attacks on the Eisenhower administration's environmental program were meaningless if Democrats did not act on legislation designed to protect the gorge. Such action was essential to the election of Democrats in the Pacific Northwest, especially those in races for the House of Representatives and the Senate.⁴

Democrats stepped up their attacks on GOP environmental policies in the weeks after Butler's challenge. Senator Estes Kefauver, a Tennessee Democrat and presidential candidate, lambasted the White House's resource record. In his early campaign speeches, Kefauver attacked the president's controversial partnership policy and scored the

3. *Ibid.*, Chapman v. Federal Power Commission, 345 U.S. 169 (1953); "Hells Canyon Appeal Planned," New York Times, 25 October 1956, p. 36; "Power Case Appealed," New York Times, 31 October 1956, p. 35; "Appeal on Dam Fails," New York Times, 18 November 1956, p. 88.

4. Paul Butler to Senator Lyndon Johnson, 16 March 1956, 129-C 1956 folder, Box 1017, White House Central Files, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library; "Democrats Call Strategy Parley," New York Times, 26 March 1956, p. 1.

administration's careless handling of natural assets. The senator asserted that only private electric companies benefited from the policies begun by President Eisenhower and Secretary of the Interior Douglas McKay. Neuberger shared many of Kefauver's opinions and told New York's Public Affairs Committee that the United States squandered natural assets more recklessly than any other nation in history. He inveighed against Idaho Power's development of Hells Canyon and wondered whether future generations of Americans would regret the damsite's waste.⁵

National hydroelectric stalwarts still faced a difficult struggle in securing authorization for a single Hells Canyon dam. Eisenhower and McKay favored private development of the gorge, as did most congressional Republicans. Further, Congress had twice ignored Hells Canyon bills authored by Senator Wayne Morse, an Oregon Democrat. Morse and his Democratic colleagues insisted that recent events favored passage of their legislation. Democrats controlled the Eighty-fourth Congress, and Republicans, scarred by attacks on their environmental record in 1954, could not relish the thought of a prolonged fight over the damsite. Additionally, the FPC decided the Hells Canyon case just one day after Congress adjourned in 1955. The commission's

5. "Kefauver Opens Fight in Oregon," New York Times, 22 April 1956, p. 72; "Kefauver Scores U.S. Power Policy," New York Times, 29 April 1956, p. 60; "Kefauver Scores TVA Opponents," New York Times, 20 May 1956, p. 60; "Resources Wasted, Neuberger Charges," New York Times, 21 January 1956, p. 40.

impolitic timing left many senators wondering whether the commission feared a congressional rebuke.⁶

Organizations such as the Grange and Farmers Union rallied grassroots support for the single dam. Group leaders urged their members to write their representatives and promote public control of Hells Canyon. In an outpouring of member solidarity, members flooded congressional offices with letters demanding construction of a national structure in the canyon. These missives favored federal control of the canyon by a ten to one margin. Many congressional representatives, both from and outside the Pacific Northwest, received hundreds of letters favoring the single edifice. Thousands of Americans believed the Hells Canyon issue would shape future American environmental policies, and most of these citizens favored public power development.⁷

Editorial opinion in the regional and national press also favored the single dam. The influential New York Times, averring only the Bureau of Reclamation could secure true comprehensive development of the resource, backed the federal dam. Smaller papers, such as the Portland Oregonian, Sacramento Bee, and the Lewiston Morning Tribune, also supported the Morse legislation. Only the Seattle Post opposed the single

6. Report, "Hells Canyon Summary," May 1957, Hells Canyon folder, Box 2, Fred Seaton Papers, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library; Congressional Record, 84th Cong., 2d sess., 1956, 102, pt. 10: 13480.

7. Author's analysis of letters found in Congressional Record, 84th Cong., 2d sess., 1956, 102, pt. 10: 13492-13497, 13468-13470, 13475-13479 and letters at LBJ Library. See Correspondence, Constituents to Senator Johnson, 1955 and 1956, Interior and Insular Affairs folder: Hells Canyon, Box 266, Senate Collection, LBJ Library.

edifice, while the Idaho Evening Statesman, that state's largest newspaper, remained conspicuously silent on the dispute.⁸

Idaho Power's supporters began a rearguard action to defend the company's Snake River project. The Council of State Chambers of Commerce purchased advertisements in leading American newspapers denouncing proposed federal control of the Snake River. Council leaders questioned how national control would benefit Americans residing outside the Pacific Northwest. They supported the FPC's rationale for licensing private development and lauded Idaho Power for its willingness to develop the gorge. The American Farm Bureau Federation also backed the company's three-structure plan. The organization's endorsement resolution stated that private enterprise should control generation and transmission of electricity. Government, the federation maintained, must not become involved in the power industry.⁹

Congress finally addressed the Hells Canyon issue in July 1956. The Senate devoted four of the Eighty-fourth Congress's remaining days to debate over the Morse bill. Democrats wasted little time in accusing single-dam opponents of favoring private electric monopolies over their constituents' best interests. Neuberger and Morse decried the misinformation fostering many objections to the high structure. Some Pacific

8. "Developing a River," New York Times, 3 March 1956, p. 18; "Phony Tax Argument," Portland Oregonian, 5 July 1956; "Who Says The People Want Public Power,?" Seattle Post, 1 February 1956, 9, 13; "Under Which Plan are the People Paying for Dams,?" Sacramento Bee, 13 June 1956. See Congressional Record, 84th Cong., 2d sess., 1956, 102, pts. 9 and 10: A5047 and A5483 for Oregonian, Bee, and Post editorials that appeared during early 1956.

9. Congressional Record, 84th Cong., 2d sess., 1956, 102, pt 9: A5053-5054, A 5130.

Northwest citizens and elected officials believed inaccurate canards about Morse's legislation. They feared that a provision in the legislation would reserve most of the power generated at the single structure to a particular state. Governor Elmo Smith, an Oregon Republican, fell victim to this fallacious argument. Neuberger blasted the governor's gullibility and challenged his fellow elected officials, especially those in the Pacific Northwest, to reject misleading information and endorse the national dam. The high Hells Canyon edifice benefited the entire region. Politicians who denied this fact were, in Neuberger's opinion, neglecting their constituents.¹⁰

Tennessee's Kefauver pleaded with his fellow senators to prevent the loss of Hells Canyon. He feared private control of the gorge would forever be a monument to underdevelopment of environmental assets. The senator criticized the White House's apparent willingness to increase Idaho Power's hegemony in the region, charging the corporation with being a "monopoly utility which rules Idaho with an iron hand." Kefauver sharply rebuked those who believed that government power was an example of socialism or communism and told his colleagues to fear private electric monopolies.¹¹

Democrats, however, reserved their sharpest barbs for the FPC. They believed that the commission recklessly approved a plan promising incomplete use of Hells Canyon. Democrats largely accepted the arguments made by the NHCA before the appeals court and the FPC. They affirmed figures suggesting the high dam generated at

10. Ibid., pt. 9:12671-12678.

11. Ibid., pt 10: 13470-13471.

least three hundred thousand more kilowatts of electricity and provided almost four times the flood control as the three-structure plan. A Bureau of Reclamation dam, in their estimation, augmented other structures in the region and better conformed to the Pacific Northwest's needs. For many Democrats, the FPC's failure to recognize the superiority of national development represented an abandonment of the commission's statutory duty. Democratic senators saw little difference in the federal Hells Canyon project and a similar project planned for the Upper Colorado Basin (UCB).¹² Even the Eisenhower White House supported the UCB, and Democrats gleefully noted even the president understood the importance of hydroelectricity when it served his purposes. Neuberger mused the only difference between the two projects was the administration's private power friends did not want the UCB.¹³

Republicans countered that Congress must respect the FPC's ruling in the Hells Canyon matter. GOP senators, such as Utah's Arthur Watkins, held that passage of the Morse bill was tantamount to destroying the FPC. Reversing the commission's decision, he argued, would establish a poor precedent, forever weakening the body. If Democrats truly believed that the commission was ceding valuable natural assets to private monopolies, they should introduce a bill to abolish the agency. Republicans maintained that the FPC had unique abilities to decide hydroelectric cases. Commission experts had

12. The Eisenhower White House supported the UCB project, a federal plan to build a complex system of reservoirs for power generation and irrigation in Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming. Congress passed the UCB in April 1956. The president promptly signed the legislation.

13. Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Mandate for Change* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1963), 499; "Measure Hits Senate Floor," *Idaho Evening Statesman*, 18 July 1956, p. 1; "Cost of Construction Project," *New York Times*, 11 March 1956, p. 10.

the time to study electric company proposals at length and make objective judgments detached from politics.¹⁴

GOP senators also criticized Democrats for their desire to renege on a federal government contract. They argued that the FPC awarded the company a legitimate license to develop Hells Canyon. Idaho Power officials honored their part of the contract by immediately beginning construction of the Brownlee Dam, which they scheduled for completion in early 1958. Republicans questioned whether the Democrats wanted to fund a \$560 million federal structure and pay an indemnity to Idaho Power for the company's losses. Were such expenditures feasible when the nation was running a budget deficit?¹⁵

Both sides thought they acted in defense of local interests in the Hells Canyon dispute. Republicans claimed they wanted to protect the jobs of thousands of workers already building the company's three structures. GOP senators also contended that the Pacific Northwest could not wait up to ten years for a national dam in the gorge when Idaho Power could deliver the necessary electricity by the early 1960s. Democrats contended that the region's citizens could not afford the high price of private electricity as they declared that Idaho Power's electricity would cost more than three times the price of federal electricity. Cheap government power, unlike the company's electricity, could lure

14. Congressional Record, 84th Cong., 2d sess., 1956, pt. 10: 12995-13008, 13466-13467.

15. *Ibid.*, pt. 10: 13245-13251; "Preview of Debate Is Given," Idaho Evening Statesman, 17 July 1956, p. 1; "Measure Hits Floor of Senate," Idaho Evening Statesman, 18 July 1956, p. 1.

much needed industry to the Pacific Northwest, providing jobs for the region's denizens.¹⁶

Democrats boldly asserted that local opinion favored the high dam and reveled in characterizing the Hells Canyon fight as a David and Goliath struggle. National electric defenders fought with telegrams and letters to Congress while Idaho Power countered by spending thousands of dollars on lobbyists. Lawmakers received hundreds of constituent letters supporting the single structure, and several Democratic senators happily read some of these missives during Senate debate. The letters came from a motley assortment of organizations. Members of the Farmers Union, the Grange, and local labor clubs predictably backed national development. Some local business groups, especially from eastern Oregon counties near the damsite, also staunchly defended the single dam.¹⁷

The GOP, which loudly proclaimed it supported greater local participation on environmental issues, lost the public relations battle over Hells Canyon. Americans, especially those in the Pacific Northwest, accepted Democratic charges that the GOP planned to cede America's greatest natural resources to private businesses. Republicans and their private electric allies, who claimed few grassroots supporters, gave little indication to refute this charge. The organizations most vigorous in support of Idaho Power were business groups from outside the region. For example, the Council of State Chambers of Commerce and the American Farm Bureau Federation, both national

16. *Ibid.*; Congressional Record, 84th Cong., 2d sess., 1956, pt. 10: 13125-13135.

17. Congressional Record, 84th Cong., 2d sess., 1956, pts. 9 and 10: A 4967, A5349, A5363, and A5569.

groups, spent thousands of dollars running newspaper advertisements in defense of the private company. The corporation's proponents, however, did not point out that Idaho Power itself was an outsider. The company was originally chartered in Maine in 1915, and only 40 percent of the company's stockholders at this time lived in Oregon or Idaho. Its ten largest stockholders were insurance companies and investment houses from the East.¹⁸

Republicans charged Democrats with using the Hells Canyon issue for political gain. An outraged Senator Barry Goldwater, an Arizona Republican, labeled the Hells Canyon debate "politics in its rawest form." GOP senators questioned why the opposition party waited until the last days of the Eighty-fourth Congress to schedule debate on the matter. This timing, they charged, seemed designed to make Idaho Power's development an election year issue in 1956. Republican claims grew stronger when GOP senators obtained a copy of Butler's letter and read the Democrat's instructions into the Congressional Record. Butler had clearly encouraged fellow Democrats to use Hells Canyon for political gain. Democratic calls for a nonpartisan environmental policy suddenly seemed hollow and hypocritical.¹⁹

18. Congressional Record, 84th Cong., 2d sess., 1956, pt. 10: 13480; Robert Tabor Averitt, "The Hells Canyon Controversy," (master's thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 1957), 55-56; Susan Stacy, Legacy of Light: A History of the Idaho Power Company (Boise: Idaho Power, 1991), 1-10. Idaho Power's ten largest stockholders in 1956 were Steere and Company (Philadelphia), Aetna Insurance (Hartford), Baer Stearns (New York), Catton and Company (Boston), Eastman Dillon (New York), Hallgarten and Company (New York), John Hancock Insurance (Boston), Northwestern Mutual Life (Milwaukee), Olen and Company (Chicago), and New England Mutual Life (Boston).

19. *Ibid.*, Congressional Record pt. 10: 13492, 13497-13498; "Measure Hits Floor of Senate," Idaho Evening Statesman, 18 July 1956, p. 1.

Eisenhower and his aides, however, still feared the Morse legislation. The president believed that passage of the Hells Canyon bill was tantamount to approval of the entire Democratic power program. The Morse bill, therefore, threatened the White House's partnership initiative, the cornerstone of administration electric policy. Further, Morse and the Democrats openly planned to use the issue to control the Senate for the next two years.²⁰ The administration embarked on a mission to lobby wavering GOP senators and urged Republicans to support the president's environmental policies in order to counter the partisan Democratic charges. Administration officials reminded senators that the president supported federal power, but his endorsement could not extend to the Hells Canyon project.²¹

On 19 July 1956 senators finally voted on Morse's legislation. The Senate rejected federal development by a vote of fifty-one to forty-one. Only two Republicans, Senators William Langer of North Dakota and Andrew Wiley of Wisconsin, supported national power, while eight Democrats, mostly from the South, favored private

20. Minutes, Legislative Meeting at Gettysburg, PA, 10 July 1956, Legislative Meetings 1956 (4) [July-November] folder, Box 2, Legislative Meetings Series, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library; Assistant Staff Secretary L. A. Minnick to Percival F. Brundage, Director Bureau of the Budget, 10 July 1956, Legislative Meetings 1956 (4) [July-November] folder, Box 2, Legislative Meetings Series, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library.

21. RNC Fact Sheet, 7 February 1956, 129C-1956 folder, Box 1017, White House Central Files, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library; "White House Bids Senate Bar Dam at Hells Canyon," New York Times, 18 July 1956, p. 1.

development.²² Idaho Power opponents credited the company's supporters with being better organized in the Senate, but single structure champions promised a rematch in the fall elections. Senator Joseph O'Mahoney, a Wyoming Democrat, reminded jubilant Republicans that voters would have the last say on the matter in November.²³

The defeat of Hells Canyon legislation in Congress allowed the Democrats to exploit the issue in the 1956 elections. Former President Harry Truman told voters that the Eisenhower administration planned to surrender natural assets to a few corporations and individuals. He pointed to Hells Canyon as proof that the United States would not have one great damsite left if Democrats did not recapture the White House and win the Congress in 1956. The presidential race between Eisenhower and Adlai Stevenson, however, involved less discussion of resource policies than in 1952. Instead, environmental assets were a local issue in the fall elections.²⁴

Republicans also acknowledged the importance of the 1956 elections. The White House especially wanted to defeat Morse in Oregon, thereby silencing their loudest electric policy critic. Sherman Adams, the White House Chief of Staff, and Herbert

22. Democrats Byrd and Robertson (Virginia), Russell (Georgia), Long (Louisiana), Eastland (Mississippi), Ervin (North Carolina), Frear (Delaware), and Smathers (Florida) all voted against federal development.

23. Congressional Record, 84th Cong., 2d sess., 1956, 102, pt. 10: 13498; "High Hells Canyon Dam Bill Dies in Senate," Idaho Evening Statesman, 19 July 1956, p. 1; "Senate Rejects Hells Canyon Dam Bill, 51 to 41," Lewiston Morning Tribune, 20 July 1956, p. 1.

24. Elmo Richardson, Dams, Parks and Politics (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1973), 171-187; A. Robert Smith, The Tiger in the Senate: The Biography of Wayne Morse (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1962), 313-320; Stuart Gerry Brown, Adlai Stevenson: A Short Biography (Woodbury, NY: Barron's Woodbury Press, 1965), 141-153.

Brownell, the administration's Attorney General, gave Secretary McKay an internal GOP poll showing only he could defeat Morse. Brownell and Adams promised the secretary that he had the president's full backing and would receive help in raising campaign funds. The secretary resigned his Cabinet post on 9 March 1956 and agreed to challenge Morse.²⁵

Democrats, who believed McKay had long been a political liability to the administration, accused the White House of purposely sending the secretary into an unwinnable campaign. Morse relished the opportunity to campaign against McKay and told Oregon voters that the Senate race offered them a choice between himself, a man who represented public interests, and McKay, who represented private interests. The senator blamed the Pacific Northwest's economic hardships on GOP cuts in dam building and other federal programs. The only thriving businesses in the region, Morse maintained, were the private electrical monopolies.²⁶

Morse conducted an aggressive reelection campaign, and his supporters never missed an opportunity to call the former secretary "Giveaway McKay," a terse description of what he symbolized to Democrats. The incumbent, who used frequent radio and television talks to advance his message, seemed better informed on the issues. In contrast, McKay seemed to rely on the president's coattails and Adams's assurances of

25. Richardson, Dams, 171-174; Smith, Tiger, 313-315; Sherman Adams, Firsthand Report (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1961), 235-237; "Western Land of Riches: Oregon," New York Times, 20 October 1956, p. 73.

26. Richardson, Dams, 171-186; Smith, Tiger, 313-320.

substantial Republican National Committee funding. Although Eisenhower contributed twenty-five dollars to McKay's election efforts, he did not even make a campaign appearance for the former secretary until October. McKay ran an unfocused campaign and refused to debate Morse. He concentrated his election efforts on small town civic groups and business organizations, constituencies that tended to support him anyhow.²⁷

Although Eisenhower won a landslide reelection to the White House and carried all three Pacific Northwest states, Democrats reigned supreme in the region's downballot races. Morse, winning all but seven of the state's counties on his way to 55 percent of the vote, whipped McKay in Oregon. Republican Representatives Harris Ellsworth and Sam Coon, both GOP opponents of the high edifice, lost their House seats in Oregon. In other races, Democrats ousted the GOP governor and achieved a split in the state Senate.²⁸

Washington voters reelected Senator Warren Magnuson, a Democratic single-dam proponent, and elected a Democratic governor. Moreover, GOP Representative Walt Horan, a high-dam supporter, easily won another term in a competitive district. In a shocking upset, Frank Church used resource issues to his advantage and ousted incumbent Republican Senator Herman Welker in Idaho, a traditional GOP bastion.

27. Ibid; Clippings from McKay's Senate Race in Oregon, 1956, Douglas McKay (1)-(3) folders, Box 26, Administration Series, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library.

28. Richardson, Dams, 178-180; Carlos A. Schwantes, The Pacific Northwest: An Interpretative History (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 358-360.

Idaho voters in the Hells Canyon region also sent Democratic Representative Gracie Pfof, a federal power supporter, back to Washington.²⁹

The defeats continued to baffle the Eisenhower White House. Jerry Parsons, the president's personal aide, spoke for many in the administration when he bemoaned Oregon's failure to realize the wonderful job McKay did. McKay thanked Eisenhower for his support in the tough campaign and told the president that Oregon voters still respected the administration. The former secretary attributed his loss to the post-World War II growth of labor unions in Oregon and pledged to work to rebuild the party in his home state.³⁰

A poll of Oregon voters conducted by a regional public relations firm revealed only 22 percent of voters understood the administration's much ballyhooed partnership initiative, while 52 percent correctly identified Morse's ideas on resource policy. The administration finally began to acknowledge that their partnership salesman, Douglas McKay, failed in selling their environmental program.³¹

Public power proponents successfully kept the Hells Canyon dispute alive in 1956 after Congress and the Eisenhower administration rejected federal development of the gorge. The continuing Hells Canyon debate damaged Republicans politically in 1956; the

29. Clippings, Idaho, Oregon, Washington, and Montana elections, 1956, Republican National Committee Clippings and Publication File, Box 8, Campaign Series, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library.

30. "White House Needs to Make a Reappraisal," Idaho Evening Statesman, 12 November 1956, p. 4; Wilton Parsons to Douglas McKay, 7 November 1956, Douglas McKay (1) folder, Box 26, Administration Series, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library.

31. Richardson, Dams, 185.

GOP lost heavily in the Pacific Northwest, principally because of its inconsistent position on public power. Voters could not understand the administration's willingness to support federal development of the UCB while opposing similar development in Hells Canyon. Further, Eisenhower's involvement in repeated dam opening ceremonies juxtaposed with his opposition to the high Hells Canyon edifice gave the electorate a mixed message. Democratic charges that the administration wanted to give choice power sites to private companies were easier to sell politically to the electorate. Private power advocates did little to dispel the public's fears about private electric monopolies, and McKay's gaffes could not advance the White House's cause.

Eisenhower chose a polished, moderate secretary, Fred Seaton of Nebraska, to replace McKay. In many ways Seaton repaired the damage that his predecessor had done to the administration's Department of the Interior. He enhanced his party's standing among environmentally conscience voters by calling for the Mission 66 and 76 projects.³² Further, Seaton was less gaffe-prone than McKay and represented Eisenhower's partnership policy better in the press.

The Hells Canyon matter, however, remained a political issue in 1957. Democrats again raised the issue in the Senate and linked federal development of the gorge to the Civil Rights Bill of 1957. The final stage of the dispute showed that Democrats, especially Senator Lyndon Johnson of Texas, wanted to play politics with the gorge's

32. Mission 66 called for the Bureau of Land Management to develop recreation sites across America. Mission 76 gave federal assistance to the states so that they could develop their own park and recreation programs.

development. Johnson and his supporters used Hells Canyon as “bait” to weaken civil rights legislation and enhance his political image.

CHAPTER 4

THE END OF HELLS CANYON

Democratic victories in the 1956 congressional elections gave public power supporters new hope of securing federal control of the Hells Canyon damsite. Government electric stalwarts, who continued to believe only a single, high Bureau of Reclamation dam could ensure the canyon's comprehensive resource use, persisted in calling for federal development of the gorge. Led by the National Hells Canyon Association (NHCA), they asked the United States Supreme Court to review the Federal Power Commission's (FPC) decision to license the Idaho Power Company's three-dam proposal for the middle Snake River. The NHCA's chief allies in Congress, Democratic Senators Wayne Morse and Richard Neuberger of Oregon, again introduced legislation calling for a national structure in the canyon. After a contentious debate, the Senate passed a Hells Canyon bill in 1957. Many lawmakers, however, voted for the legislation largely because of a quid pro quo engineered by Senate Majority Leader Lyndon Johnson, a Texas Democrat. He convinced Southern Democrats to support a national dam in Hells Canyon so Western senators would vote for a weakened Civil Rights Act of 1957. This vote trade helped Johnson politically, but it did little to encourage public control of Hells Canyon. Instead, it ended serious consideration of building a government dam in the gorge and made Hells Canyon a "political football" whose only value came from its use

in a vote exchange.¹

Early in 1957 the NHCA, the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, and eight Washington Public Utility Districts asked the Supreme Court to review the FPC's decision to license private development of the gorge. These public electric backers charged that the commission's Hells Canyon ruling violated the Federal Power Act. The organizations believed that under the law the central government, not private enterprise, had a responsibility to harness hydroelectricity on major American rivers such as the Snake River. The NHCA and its allies accused the FPC of blatantly ignoring a plethora of evidence suggesting only the single structure would harness the canyon's full resource potential. Champions of federal development worried that the FPC's decision in the Hells Canyon dispute portended badly for the future of American resource policy. The outcome of the controversy, the organizations claimed, would influence America's future environmental policies and promised to affect every river basin in the nation. They urged the Court, therefore, to overturn the commission's ruling in the matter and assert government hegemony over the damsite.²

Attorneys for Idaho Power and the FPC opposed the NHCA and its partners and implored the high tribunal to drop the matter. They noted that the federal power champions had no new evidence or arguments to buttress their position. FPC and corporation attorneys reminded the Court that the commission heard testimony on the

1. Congressional Record, 85th Cong., 1st sess., 1957, 103, pt. 8: 9977; Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, Lyndon B. Johnson: The Exercise of Power (New York: The New American Library, 1966), 118-126.

2. National Hells Canyon Association Inc. (NHCA), Lewis County Public Utility District, et al., Petitioners, v. Federal Power Commission (FPC) and Idaho Power Company, 77 S.Ct. 773 (1957).

Hells Canyon matter for one year and had doubtless considered every consequence of private and public development. Further, Congress had twice rejected federal control of the gorge and the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit had refused to overturn the case just a few months earlier.³

The Supreme Court agreed with the FPC and Idaho Power, and on 1 April 1957, the justices denied the petitioners' request to rehear the case. Only Justice William O. Douglas wanted to consider the NHCA's appeal. Recent Court rulings presaged the high tribunal's action in the Hells Canyon matter. In a similar case, Chapman v. Federal Power Commission, the Court sided with private electric supporters and upheld the right of nonfederal entities to build hydroelectric plants.⁴

Proponents of Idaho Power's three-structure plan cheered the Court's decision to deny the NHCA's appeal petition. Thomas E. Roach, the company's president, believed the tribunal's ruling was a victory for orderly government. He argued that the justices' decision reaffirmed the FPC's authority over hydroelectric matters. The Court, he thought, recognized the commission's unique role in waterpower decisions and was unwilling to interfere in the matter. Governor Robert Smylie, an Idaho Republican, also praised the ruling, averring that his state badly needed the power promised by the three private dams. Idaho Power's proposal, he and Roach reminded reporters, could supply electricity to the power-starved Pacific Northwest six years before the federal structure

3. Ibid.; NHCA v. FPC, 237 U.S. 777 (1956); "Drop Hells Canyon, High Court Asked," New York Times, 16 March 1957, p. 9.

4. NHCA v. FPC, 773; "High Court Bans Public Power Bid on Hells Canyon," New York Times, 2 April 1957, p. 1; "Public Power Is Dealt Blow By Tribunal," Idaho Evening Statesman, 1 April 1957, p. 1; Chapman v. Federal Power Commission (FPC), 345 U.S. 169 (1953).

would be completed.⁵

Public electric supporters and their Democratic allies looked to congressional action as the last opportunity to secure the high Hells Canyon dam. Representative Gracie Pfof, an Idaho Democrat and single structure advocate, asserted that Congress had a responsibility to protect the Hells Canyon damsite for future generations of Americans. Supporters of Bureau of Reclamation development realized they faced an arduous struggle. Even C. Giraud Davidson, counsel for the irrepressible NHCA, recognized that in 1957 the single-dam advocates had their the last opportunity to stop Idaho Power's plans for the gorge.⁶

In the Senate, Morse and Neuberger were already working assiduously to save the government Hells Canyon dam. On 14 January 1957, the two Oregon lawmakers introduced a third bill calling for federal control of the canyon. Their act, Senate Bill 555, differed little from previous calls for a single Bureau of Reclamation edifice in Hells Canyon. As with earlier bills, the Morse-Neuberger legislation asserted the supremacy of a high dam, which the two senators expected would produce more electricity and flood control than three small structures. Twenty-seven other senators, all Democrats except GOP Senators Andrew Wiley of Wisconsin and William Langer of North Dakota, cosponsored the Morse-Neuberger act.⁷

5. "Decision is Hailed in Boise," Idaho Evening Statesman, 1 April 1957, p. 1.

6. "Backers of High Dam Eye Congress Action," Idaho Evening Statesman, 2 April 1957, p. 1.

7. Congressional Record, 85th Cong., 1st sess., 1957, 103, pt. 1: 478, 506; "Senators to Renew Hells Canyon Fight," New York Times, 14 January 1957, p. 14.

Despite their two previous failures to authorize a national Hells Canyon dam, the two Oregon solons expected the Senate to approve their new bill. Although Democrats had the same forty-nine to forty-seven majority they had when the Senate defeated a federal Hells Canyon structure in 1956, Morse and Neuberger believed the results of the 1956 congressional elections would dissuade Republicans from actively opposing Senate Bill 555. Democrats, the lawmakers observed, dominated the previous fall elections in the Pacific Northwest and won almost every race in which environmental assets were an issue. Even Republican leaders, such as former Governor Charles A. Sprague of Oregon, urged President Dwight D. Eisenhower to reconsider his ill-defined and unpopular partnership policy. Sprague suggested the Oregon Senate race, where Morse defeated chief partnership salesman and former Secretary of the Interior Douglas McKay, clearly showed that voters rejected the administration's resource policies. Thus, the White House should admit its mistakes and support federal hydroelectric development of major damsites such as Hells Canyon.⁸

Administration moves showed the White House realized McKay had been a political hindrance to Eisenhower and the GOP. The secretary's careless comments and inability to avoid controversy allowed the opposition to seize control of resource issues, specifically the Hells Canyon controversy. Gleeful Democrats, who branded him "Giveaway McKay," constantly forced the secretary to defend himself against claims he favored business interests over the public good. After McKay resigned his Cabinet post

8. Elmo Richardson, *Dams, Parks and Politics* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1973), 182-186; Senator Wayne Morse to Governor Charles A. Sprague, 26 November 1956. See *Congressional Record*, 85th Cong., 1st sess., 1957, 103, pt. 1: 507.

in early 1956, Eisenhower instituted a “goodbye giveaway” effort at the Department of the Interior. After a painstaking search for a new secretary, the White House tapped Fred Seaton to head the department.⁹

Seaton, a Nebraskan, owned several small Midwestern newspapers and had originally joined the Eisenhower team as a State Department official. He later served as an assistant to Sherman Adams, the White House Chief of Staff, where he was the administration’s liaison to the Department of the Interior. The new secretary earned accolades from his colleagues for being a pragmatic politician whom Adams regarded as the best member of his staff. Seaton was not an ideologue and won plaudits from Democrats for not crying socialism in every debate over power policy. Although the secretary supported Eisenhower’s partnership initiative, he reassured White House critics that he enthusiastically favored national electricity when necessary.¹⁰

Seaton’s moderate tone, however, did not produce an immediate change in the administration’s partnership plan. In a television interview, the secretary declared the administration did not plan to retreat from partnership. He also rejected Democratic assertions that the public opposed GOP environmental policy and that the 1956 elections in the Pacific Northwest turned on resource matters.¹¹

9. Richardson, Dams, 187-190; Dwight D. Eisenhower, Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1953-1961, vol. 4 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1960), 565-566.

10. Richardson, Dams, 183-190; Sherman Adams, Firsthand Report (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1961), 146, 237; Dwight D. Eisenhower, Mandate for Change (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1963), 583.

11. Richardson, Dams, 190-192; Transcript, Fred Seaton, interview by CBS panel, Face the Nation, Columbia Broadcasting System, 20 January 1957, 129C-1957 folder, Box 1017, General File, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library.

Many Republicans, such as former Under Secretary of the Interior Ralph Tudor, believed that any change in the White House's power strategy would weaken the FPC's authority and prolong the Hells Canyon fight. They held that the administration's overall goal of reducing the scope of American government would be irrevocably damaged by retreating on the Department of the Interior's power program. Further, Tudor still believed internal GOP polls that suggested the power issue lost no votes for the GOP.¹²

Democrats craved any opportunity further to damage the administration's resource record and relished another battle over Hells Canyon. Morse, the single edifice's chief advocate, claimed the damsite remained the most significant hydroelectric asset remaining in the United States and announced his intention to press for federal development in the Eighty-fifth Congress. The issues and leading figures in the Hells Canyon controversy remained largely the same as in the previous Congress. Morse, Neuberger, Pfoz, and Senator Estes Kefauver, a Tennessee Democrat, were the leading supporters of the single structure. Republican Senators Barry Goldwater of Arizona, Arthur Watkins of Utah, and Henry Dworshak of Idaho continued to lead the fight for private development.¹³

Morse and his fellow Democrats opened the Hells Canyon debate by reiterating studies suggesting a single dam would provide more electricity and flood control than private development. They averred the single dam could add at least 436,000 kilowatts of

12. Ralph A. Tudor to Sherman Adams, 7 January 1957, 129C-1957 folder, Box 1017, General File, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library; L.A. Minnich to Percival Brundage, 14 May 1957, Legislative Meetings 1957 (3) [May-June] folder, Box 2, Legislative Meetings Series, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library.

13. Congressional Record, 85th Cong., 1st sess., 1957, 103, pt. 1: 506-512.

hydroelectricity for the Pacific Northwest. The high edifice could release water to aid power generation at eight other structures such as McNary, Ice Harbor, The Dalles, and Bonneville.¹⁴ Additionally, the Bureau of Reclamation edifice itself would produce more power than the three Idaho Power dams combined.¹⁵

In the House of Representatives, Pfof lauded federal development and promised her colleagues national control of the damsite would aid in navigation and flood control. She warned that rejecting the public edifice would sink a “dagger in the heart” of full development of the Pacific Northwest. The government dam, which she called indispensable, would supply electricity at less than half the cost of private power. Pacific Northwest citizens needed the inexpensive public hydroelectricity to foster economic development in Idaho, Oregon, and Washington. The region, already suffering from an economic downturn, needed the jobs and industry that government power could lure. The GOP apparently did not understand the importance of water in the Pacific Northwest and demonstrated their myopia by willingly giving Hells Canyon to Idaho Power. Democrats, who charged private power companies dictated Republican resource policies, expected no less from the GOP leadership. Republicans, the Democratic spokespersons asserted, showed little concern for the people’s best interest and did not care about Hells Canyon.¹⁶

14. Democrats claimed that the high Hells Canyon structure could add 65,000 kilowatts to Ice Harbor; 48,000 to McNary; 50,000 to The Dalles; and 24,000 to Bonneville, all government dams. Idaho Power’s three small dams could not release significant water to downstream sites.

15. Congressional Record, 85th Cong., 1st sess., 1957, 103, pt. 1: 506-507 and pt. 5: 6131.

16. *Ibid.*, pt. 5: 6130-6133; Carlos A. Schwantes, The Pacific Northwest: An Interpretative History (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 347-349.

Republicans dismissed the familiar Democratic attacks and reminded their colleagues that Congress, the FPC, and two federal courts had rejected the same Democratic arguments. GOP lawmakers pointed out that the FPC found Idaho Power's three-dam proposal led to comprehensive development of the middle Snake River. Republicans accepted the commission's ruling that the additional electricity produced at the high dam did not justify its \$560 million cost. Further, GOP leaders cited commission reports that averred the two competing proposals would produce identical recreation, flood control, and navigation benefits.¹⁷

Both parties thought they represented local interest in the Hells Canyon dispute. Democrats argued the 1956 congressional elections in Oregon, Washington, and Idaho suggested the desire of local denizens for a single dam. Morse and Pfof asserted that the Pacific Northwest's voters had "revolted" over the Republicans' repeated efforts to block national development of the gorge. Of the twelve election contests involving resource issues in the three states, Democrats won nine and high-dam supporters won ten.¹⁸

Grassroots organizations, chiefly the NHCA, organized voters and promoted the benefits

17. Congressional Record, 85th Cong, 1st sess., 1957, 103, pt. 8: 9916-9919, 9972-9974; Federal Power Commission, Project Nos. 1971, 2132, and 2133: Idaho Power Company, 14 FPC 57.

18. Democratic dam defenders dominated 1956 congressional and gubernatorial races in the region. Frank Church (Idaho), Wayne Morse (Oregon), and Warren Magnuson (Washington) won Senate races. Robert Holmes (Oregon) and Albert Rosellini (Washington) won governorships. Al Ullman, Edith Green, Charles Porter (all of Oregon), and Gracie Pfof (Idaho) won House seats. Republicans Walt Horan (Washington), Albin Norblad (Oregon), and Hamer Budge (Idaho) all retained their House seats. Horan was a high dam supporter.

of the high dam. Democrats credited these organizations as essential to their electoral successes.¹⁹

Republican members of Congress disagreed with the Democrats' interpretation of the election results. Watkins pointed out that Eisenhower won all three Pacific Northwest states in the 1956 election, but he failed to explain why the popular GOP president carried each state by a smaller margin than in 1952. Dworshak also disputed Morse's analysis of the Oregon and Washington Senate races. The Idaho solon suggested that Morse and Democrat Warren Magnuson of Washington won reelection because both were incumbent senators. Republicans instead credited increased labor union activity and incumbency, not the Hells Canyon issue, as the catalyst for the Democrats' success in the region.²⁰

GOP lawmakers also questioned the amount of grassroots support for the high edifice. Arizona's Barry Goldwater thought that Democratic claims of a public mandate for the high dam were mere hyperbole. He told his colleagues that only thirty people attended the NHCA's most recent spring meeting. This sparse turnout hardly seemed to justify the association's boast that it had one million members nationwide. Further, a study of the contributions to the organization between 1953 and 1955 revealed most of the organization's funding came from labor groups. A mere 3 percent of the group's

19. Richardson, Dams, 171-186; Congressional Record, 85th Cong., 1st sess., 1957, 103, pt. 1: 506-507, 512-513 and pt. 5: 6131-6133.

20. *Ibid.*

funding came from individuals.²¹

The drab congressional debate continued until 17 April 1957, when the Office of Defense Mobilization (ODM) awarded Idaho Power two accelerated tax amortization certificates for the Hells Canyon project. This provision of the U.S. Tax Code permitted corporations to write-off the cost of building their production facilities over five years if the project was necessary for national defense. Idaho Power, therefore, could deduct 65 percent of Brownlee's cost and 60 percent of Oxbow's from its income taxes. The company averred that its three-dam plan was essential to meet the power requirements of the growing Pacific Northwest. Further, hydroelectricity from the three structures could aid in national defense by raising production at the region's aluminum and aircraft factories.²²

Democrats assailed the agency's move and claimed these tax write-offs gave Idaho Power an interest-free loan. The ODM's ruling, Democrats posited, was another example of the administration's giveaway mentality. Not only did the Eisenhower administration plan to cede Hells Canyon to a Maine corporation, the White House paid them to take it. Oregon's Al Ullman, a freshman Democratic House member and former NHCA leader, scored ODM claims that the agency issued the certificates for defense purposes. The representative believed the three low dams precluded comprehensive

21. Congressional Record, 85th Cong., 1st sess., 1957, 103, pt. 6: 7937-7939. Between 1953 and 1955, the NHCA raised \$111,196.71, of which only \$3,784.68 came from individual donors. Labor groups such as the International Union of Operating Engineers (\$5,000), the International Association of Machinists (\$4,500), and the United Brotherhood of Carpenters (\$3,500) were the organization's largest donors.

22. "Hells Canyon Summary," Hells Canyon folder, Box 2, Fred Seaton Papers, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library; "Hells Canyon Plan on Taxes Upheld," New York Times, 27 April 1957, p. 10.

development of the Snake River, making it impossible for them to benefit military readiness.²³

Furious Democrats reminded their GOP opponents that the private company had pledged to develop the damsite without using taxpayer money. Ullman estimated the tax break gave the corporation a \$329 million windfall over its fifty-year Hells Canyon lease. FPC estimates justified Democratic fears. Richard Rainwater, a commission accountant, determined the rapid amortization directly cost taxpayers \$83 million and could net the company between \$254 and \$332 million.²⁴

Kefauver and other Democrats, however, reserved their most acerbic barbs for the administration's handling of the tax write-off. The Tennessee senator charged the administration with leaking information about the amortization certificates. ODM and Idaho Power representatives signed the write-off certificates on 17 April 1957, but the deal did not go public for eight days. Kefauver observed that forty-three hundred shares of the company's stock traded hands on 24 April, one day before the public learned of the tax abatement. Only seven or eight hundred shares of Idaho Power stock exchanged hands on a typical day. Democrats soon learned that the ODM's public journal of 24 April carried news about the issuance of tax certificates to the corporation. Kefauver and

23. "Write-Offs Spur New Power Fight," New York Times, 2 June 1957, p. 80; Congressional Record, 85th Cong., 1st sess., 1957, 103, pt. 5: 6132-6133.

24. "Write-Off Losses Put at 83 Million," New York Times, 1 June 1957, p. 1; "Power Tax Delay Scored in Capitol," New York Times, 30 April 1957, p. 30.

his colleagues believed this supposed oversight gave investors, specifically those in the West, ample time to trade shares of Idaho Power.²⁵

Private electric supporters began a last-minute rearguard action to save the company's Hells Canyon proposal. Secretary of the Treasury George Humphrey told lawmakers that the administration supported a Democratic plan to limit the number of industries eligible for rapid amortization. Even President Eisenhower commented on the issue, asserting the government should not give huge tax breaks to large corporations. At the same time, the president defended Gordon Gray, Director of the ODM, for issuing the certificates. Gray, Eisenhower argued, acted within his authority and received no White House pressure to make any particular ruling.²⁶

Republicans in Congress assured Democratic critics the ODM did not rashly award its certificates. Idaho Power applied for amortization in August 1953, two years before the FPC granted the company's Hells Canyon license, and ODM and Department of the Interior officials approved the issuance of certificates in early 1956. The ODM waited to issue the write-offs because of pending congressional action and the NHCA's lawsuits against the FPC and Idaho Power. Republicans cited Roach's FPC testimony, in which he told the commission that his company applied for rapid tax amortization and

25. Congressional Record, 85th Cong., 1st sess., 1957, 103, pt. 8: 9919-9920; "Kefauver Scores Power Data Leak," New York Times, 6 June 1957, p. 22.

26. "Humphrey Backs Byrd's Tax Plan," New York Times, 8 May 1957, p. 22; "President Firm on Dam," New York Times, 15 May 1957, p. 22; "President Backs Gray in Tax Fight," New York Times, 20 June 1957, p. 19; Eisenhower, Public Papers, 5: 331-332.

planned to use it if the ODM awarded certificates.²⁷

The corporation's champions lampooned Democratic charges that the tax write-off amounted to a government subsidy or an interest-free loan. Idaho Power received a benefit that several hundred Pacific Northwest corporations, including Boeing Aircraft, Weyerhaeuser Timber, and Northern Pacific Railway, enjoyed in the 1950s. The company, which saved the government at least \$500 million by making the high dam unnecessary, thought it deserved financial incentive for risking \$133 million to build three structures in Hells Canyon. Watkins urged his fellow lawmakers to support the private structures because revoking Idaho Power's lease would only prolong the debate. Further, abandoning a legal contract established bad precedent, implying the central government did not have to honor its agreements.²⁸

Idaho Power feared it could lose the Hells Canyon damsite and abruptly sought to cancel the rapid tax amortization certificates. In a letter to Gray, Roach held that the tax amortization conflict obscured the real issues surrounding Idaho Power's control of the damsite and threatened to slow the project's completion. Idaho Power's president defended the write-off concept and declared that Brownlee and Oxbow clearly met the agency's criteria for receiving a rapid tax write-off. He also challenged congressional

27. "Hells Canyon Summary," Hells Canyon folder, Box 2, Fred Seaton Papers, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library; "Tax Monies Shifted on Hells Canyon," New York Times, 12 June 1957, p. 38; "Subsidy is Denied on Hells Canyon," New York Times, 14 June 1957, p. 18.

28. Congressional Record, 85th Cong., 1st sess., 1957, 103, pt. 8: 9917-9919, 9975-9976.

Democrats to limit or eliminate the rapid tax deduction concept if they felt the nation no longer needed such incentives.²⁹

Roach's move came too late. On 21 June, the Senate voted forty-five to thirty-eight to approve a single, national structure in Hells Canyon. Jubilant Democrats cheered their success and pledged to carry the fight to the House of Representatives and the White House. An equally confident Roach assured Idaho Power's stockholders that the company would prove victorious as he vowed to stop what he regarded as a vengeful congressional action.³⁰

The abrupt change in the Hells Canyon vote surprised many political observers, but it perfectly demonstrated the political genius of Senate Majority Leader Johnson. The Texan recognized that the civil rights issue threatened to tear the Democratic Party apart. Johnson, however, was convinced that he could hold his party together despite its massive split over the issue. Civil rights, in Johnson's opinion, held the key to both the electoral prospects of the Democratic Party and his own political future. A divided party could not recapture the White House and a politically damaged Johnson could not become his party's presidential nominee.³¹

29. *Ibid.*, pt 8: 9974-9976; Thomas E. Roach to Gordon Gray, 20 June 1957. See Congressional Record, 85th Cong., 1st sess., 1957, 103, pt 8: 9918; "Idaho Power Turns Down Fast Write-Off on Two Dams," New York Times, 21 June 1957, p. 1; "Idaho Power Rejects Fast Depreciation On Brownlee and Oxbow," Idaho Evening Statesman, 21 June 1957, p. 2.

30. "Hells Canyon Dam Bill Passes Senate," Idaho Evening Statesman, 21 June 1957, p. 1; "Senate Approves Public-Built Dam at Hells Canyon," New York Times, 22 June 1957, p. 1; "High Dam Bill Goes to House," Idaho Evening Statesman, 22 June 1957, p. 1; Roach to Idaho Power Shareholders, 24 June 1957, 129C-1957 folder, Box 1017, General File, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library.

31. Gilbert C. Fite, Richard B. Russell: Senator From Georgia (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 329-338; Robert Mann, The Walls of Jericho (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1996), 184.

In the wake of the Supreme Court's Brown v. Board of Education decision to outlaw the doctrine of separate but equal, Senator Paul Douglas of Illinois and other liberal Democrats wanted to increase legal protections for African Americans. Progressives coveted passage of the first civil rights bill since 1876, but Senator Richard Russell of Georgia and his fellow Southern Democrats balked and threatened to filibuster any Douglas bill. To prevent an internal political bloodbath, Johnson had to balance the needs of each side.³²

The Democratic leader knew that he needed to strike a deal, and he found that the Hells Canyon dam bill was perfect trade bait. Johnson knew that Western Democrats, who craved Senate approval of the single dam, would not be hurt by their vote on civil rights since their states had few African Americans. Southern Democrats, on the other hand, cared little about a Hells Canyon structure and could reverse their votes. After all, Johnson mused, the tax amortization flap gave them perfect cover for the vote exchange.³³

Western Democrats agreed to help their Dixie colleagues stop the civil rights bill. On 20 June 1957, Senators Morse, Magnuson, Mike Mansfield and James Murray of Montana, and Joseph O'Mahoney of Wyoming agreed to support Russell's move to refer the House-passed 1957 Civil Rights Act to the Judiciary Committee. Senator James Eastland, a Mississippi Democrat, chaired the committee, and Southern Democrats knew

32. Evans and Novak, Lyndon B. Johnson, 121-130; Fite, Russell, 329-336.

33. Transcript, Senator Russell B. Long Oral History Interview, 20 June 1977, by Michael L. Gillette, tape 1, page 4-8, LBJ Library; Transcript, Senator Frank Church Oral History Interview, 1 May 1969, by Paige E. Mulhollan, tape 1, page 3-7, LBJ Library; Alfred Steinberg, Sam Johnson's Boy (New York: MacMillan, 1968), 469; Evans and Novak, Lyndon B. Johnson, 130; Fite, Russell, 339.

he would use his power to kill any such bill under his jurisdiction. Senators, however, voted forty-five to thirty-nine to place the bill before the full chamber. The initial phase of the deal had failed.³⁴

Johnson convinced Southern senators to stay with the bargain. One day later, 21 June, five Dixie Democrats reversed their position on national development of the gorge. Senators Russell, Eastland, Russell Long of Louisiana, Sam Ervin of North Carolina, and George Smathers of Florida changed their 1956 votes on Hells Canyon and supported the position of federal power advocates. The five solons provided the margin of victory for the Hells Canyon bill. If they had voted as they did in 1956, the Hells Canyon legislation would have lost forty-three votes to forty.³⁵

Although they had failed to kill the civil rights legislation outright, Southern lawmakers, led by Russell, tacitly agreed to permit the passage of a weak bill. They demanded, however, that the Senate remove Section III of the act and add a jury trial amendment. Section III, which ensured African Americans the right to vote and speeded school desegregation, was the heart of the proposed law. With it gone, Southerners no longer feared the measure. Russell and his allies also demanded that the Senate insert a jury trial amendment into the act. The original 1957 Civil Rights Act, they complained, omitted any mention of ensuring jury trials for violators of the new law. Dixie Democrats

34. Congressional Record, 85th Cong., 1st sess., 1957, 103, pt. 7: 9827; Mann, Walls, 187; Evans and Novak, Lyndon B. Johnson, 129; Fite, Russell, 340; Steinberg, Johnson's Boy, 469.

35. "Alcorn Accuses Six of Dam Rights Deal," New York Times, 24 June 1957, p. 14; "Democrat Sellout is Declared in Dam Vote," Idaho Evening Statesman, 24 June 1957, p. 6; Evans and Novak, Lyndon B. Johnson, 129; Fite, Russell, 340; Mann, Walls, 187; Steinberg, Johnson's Boy, 439.

argued that such an oversight violated the constitutional guarantee of trial by jury, and they again threatened a filibuster.³⁶

On 24 July 1957, four Western Democrats continued the unique alliance. Senators Frank Church of Idaho, Mansfield, Murray, and O'Mahoney all voted for an amendment eliminating Section III of the bill. Southern senators vehemently opposed this provision, and the Senate killed the controversial measure in a fifty-two to thirty-eight vote. Western Democrats again honored their bargain on 1 August when five supported the jury trial amendment. The Senate passed the provision by a fifty-one to forty-two vote, with Western lawmakers Church, Magnuson, Mansfield, Murray, and O'Mahoney providing the amendment's margin of victory. Southern senators again allowed the civil rights measure to pass.³⁷

The full House of Representatives, however, never debated Morse's Hells Canyon legislation. Many outraged Democrats, such as New York Representative Adam Clayton Powell, refused to prevent the high dam's death. Powell promised to oppose a federal edifice until his anger over the vote trade subsided. Douglas agreed and told fellow Democrats that Southern senators had "sold counterfeit money" to Westerners to dilute the civil rights legislation. He predicted that the Hells Canyon bill would not pass the

36. Evans and Novak, Lyndon B. Johnson, 126-138; Fite, Russell, 338-340; Steinberg, Johnson's Boy, 468-471.

37. Congressional Record, 85th Cong., 1st sess., 1957, 103, pt. 9: 12565 and pt. 10: 12565, 13356; Evans and Novak, Lyndon B. Johnson, 133-137; Fite, Russell, 340; Mann, Walls, 204.

House. In short, Hells Canyon was no longer a sacrosanct Democratic issue. Johnson had made it political collateral and many in Congress wanted to spend it.³⁸

Events proved Douglas correct. On 2 July, a House Interior subcommittee voted fifteen to twelve to recommend tabling a bill authorizing a federal edifice. Worried Democrats then tried to save the bill, but the full committee's Republican minority aligned solidly against national development with the help of Democratic Representatives James Haley of Florida and George Shuford of North Carolina. At the 17 July meeting of the entire House Interior Committee, federal power supporters attempted to block the panel from voting on national control of the damsite. For two hours Democrats blocked a vote on federal development, but the committee eventually voted fifteen to fourteen to consider Hells Canyon at its next meeting. Democrats could have used Powell's vote, but the New York representative purposely missed the meeting.³⁹

Committee Republicans sensed victory in the Hells Canyon matter and asked Eisenhower to weigh in with his thoughts. In a letter to Representative Jack Westland, a Washington Republican, the president urged House members to support private development of the Hells Canyon damsite. Asserting that partnership worked better than ever, the GOP leader reminded representatives that the government simply could not

38. "Powell May Snarl Hells Canyon Bid," New York Times, 10 July 1957, p. 18; "Hells Canyon Before Congressional Subcommittee," Washington Post, 3 July 1957, p. 1; Adam Clayton Powell to Washington Post editor, 9 July 1957. See "Letters to Editor," Washington Post, 10 July 1957, p. 14.

39. "House Group Acts to Bar U.S. Dam for Hells Canyon," New York Times, 3 July 1957, p. 1; "Shift on Hells Canyon," New York Times, 11 July 1957, p. 52; "Dems Block Hells Canyon Vote," New York Times 18 July 1957, p. 11.

afford to build a federal structure when Idaho Power promised similar development.⁴⁰ Committee members agreed and voted sixteen to fourteen to table the Hells Canyon legislation, thus killing House consideration of a federal structure in the gorge. Even Oregon's Neuberger acknowledged that public power champions had no hope of ever getting a high dam in the canyon.⁴¹

Senate Majority Leader Johnson was the real winner in the Hells Canyon vote swap. Johnson's skillful Senate maneuvers secured the passage of the 1957 Civil Rights Act, the first such legislation in eighty-one years.⁴² The Democratic leader maintained party unity despite regional differences over the issue and increased his own profile to make himself a national rather than a Southern Democrat. Hells Canyon, however, was the price of Johnson's victory. The Democratic leader made Hells Canyon expendable because he knew that dam supporters could never muster a veto-proof Senate vote for federal development.

Congress never again debated the single edifice and Democrats lost a valuable campaign issue that they had used to hammer Republicans in two national elections. Idaho Power gained undisputed control of the project and began building its three small Snake River structures.

40. President Eisenhower to Representative Jack Westland, 19 July 1957. See New York Times, 25 July 1957, p. 10.

41. "House Unit Kills Hells Canyon Bill," New York Times, 25 July 1957, p. 1; "Neuberger Gives Up," New York Times, 23 July 1957, p. 14.

42. The House passed the 1957 Civil Rights Act on August 27; Senate approval came two days later. See Congressional Record, 85th Cong., 1st sess., 1957, 103, pt. 12: 16112-16113, 16478.

CONCLUSION

After ten years of contentious debate, the battle for Hells Canyon ended and private power stalwarts won. The victory freed Idaho Power to continue developing the gorge. The corporation, which began dam construction immediately after the Federal Power Commission (FPC) awarded it control of the gorge, eventually built three small structures in the canyon. Brownlee, the most southern edifice, began producing power in late 1958 just months after the controversy ended. Oxbow went on-line three years later, and the small Hells Canyon Dam produced its first hydroelectricity in 1967.¹

On 5 May 1968, a jubilant Thomas E. Roach, Idaho Power's president during the Hells Canyon dispute, formally dedicated the three structures. Company stockholders and political supporters credited him with being the driving force behind private water power on the Snake River. Roach never quit fighting for private control of the damsite, and his careful stewardship of Idaho Power ensured the project's engineering, financial, and political feasibility.²

Federal hydroelectric supporters fought with equal diligence to win approval of a single, high Bureau of Reclamation edifice in the canyon. They exhausted every method of blocking private development of the Snake River, but the FPC, two federal courts, and Congress all rejected arguments for a national Hells Canyon dam. Further, government

1. Susan Stacy, Legacy of Light: A History of the Idaho Power Company (Boise: University of Idaho Press, 1990), 151-159.

2. *Ibid.*

hydroelectric champions could not overcome the Republican administration of President Dwight D. Eisenhower. The GOP administration never budged in its support of Idaho Power's bid for the damsite.

Private control of projects such as Hells Canyon was a cornerstone of Eisenhower's political convictions. The GOP president wanted to reduce the influence of national government in Americans' lives and applied this philosophy to federal power through the partnership initiative. Eisenhower based his program on the idea that state, local, and private interests should share the burden of electric production. Such a policy was consistent with his campaign promises to replace intrusive government with a heightened commitment to free enterprise. In the wake of a national budget deficit, the White House promised Washington would undertake only the most essential waterpower projects. In short, the administration only supported building federal electric plants on major rivers. This new policy opened development projects on the Snake and other tributary rivers to private corporations such as Idaho Power.³

In doing so, the Republican White House abandoned traditional American natural resource policy. The administration's handling of environmental assets contrasted sharply with American policy dating back to the presidency of Theodore Roosevelt. Since the early twentieth century, the central government had stressed wise use of environmental resources. Washington encouraged citizens, the states, and local governments to follow comprehensive planning. This idea stressed using environmental

3. Dwight D. Eisenhower, Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1953-1961, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1960), 19-20, 26-27.

assets in ways that benefited the largest number of citizens for the longest time.⁴

Secretary of the Interior Douglas McKay applied the partnership emphasis to the Hells Canyon case and withdrew his Democratic predecessor's injunction that precluded Idaho Power from building a series of small Snake River dams. The secretary essentially refused to take a position on the development dispute. Unlike those who preceded him in heading the Department of the Interior, McKay did not believe that he needed to assert Washington's hegemony over the canyon to protect the public's best interest.⁵

McKay's move ignored the inherent supremacy of national development. He and other Republicans failed to recognize the uniqueness of Hells Canyon, a gorge deeper than the Grand Canyon. The Snake River flowed through the damsite with such force that the region was a natural source of hydroelectric power. No one questioned damming the river at Hells Canyon, but the two sides disagreed on who should control the damsite.

Advocates of federal power clearly had the superior plan to harness the canyon's full hydroelectric potential with a proposed 722-foot high structure at the damsite. The federal dam would have produced more hydroelectricity and provided more flood control than the Idaho Power proposal. Further, national development would have linked the damsite with existing and proposed government dams in the Columbia River Basin. The prodigious amount of water stored behind the public edifice could be released to aid power generation at downstream structures. The government planned for the interlinking

4. Jerome Kerwin, Federal Water-Power Legislation (New York: Columbia University Press, 1926), 7-8, 264-265, 290.

5. Report, "Hells Canyon Summary," May 1957, Hells Canyon folder, Box 2, Fred Seaton Papers, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library.

of other dams in the region, such as John Day and McNary. Water stored at one of these sites can be released to raise water levels at another. The three private dams, therefore, stood alone. They provided too little storage for such complete resource management.⁶

Pacific Northwest citizens recognized these facts and most of them supported public development of the damsite. The region's denizens outpaced the White House and Idaho Power in understanding the issues surrounding the Hells Canyon dispute. The Eisenhower administration and the corporation believed the public would support private dams in the name of local control and limited government. After all, Republican analysts claimed a majority of the electorate in Idaho, Oregon, and Washington had voted for smaller government in 1952 when they supported Eisenhower's election bid.

Democrats realized they could use Hells Canyon for quick political gain. They turned the federal versus private power feud into an election issue in the Pacific Northwest. Public hydroelectric supporters and their Democratic allies balked at partnership. They asserted the administration's decision to end government objection to Idaho Power's private Hells Canyon project amounted to a giveaway. The opposition party hammered Pacific Northwest Republicans for their support of Idaho Power. The public accepted Democratic charges and the party dominated the 1954 and 1956 elections in the region.

Pacific Northwest Republicans paid a heavy political price for supporting private control of Hells Canyon. Democrats defeated incumbent Republican Senators Guy

6. Ibid. The high dam would produce 1.2-1.5 million kilowatts of hydroelectricity and store 3.9 million acre-feet of water. Idaho Power's project would generate 900 thousand kilowatts of waterpower and provide 1.1 million acre-feet of flood control storage.

Cordon in Oregon and Herman Welker in Idaho, both high dam opponents. They also took out two incumbent GOP House members from Oregon, Representatives Sam Coon and Harris Ellsworth, and replaced Republican governors in Oregon and Washington. In each race, and in at least a dozen others, Democrats made the election contest a referendum on the Hells Canyon project. All their candidates favored government power as Republicans opposed it.⁷

In a race billed as “the battle of the titans,” Oregon Democratic Senator Wayne Morse, who introduced three bills calling for federal development of the damsite, soundly won reelection over Republican McKay. The White House had erroneously assumed the secretary could win to prove that the voters believed in Eisenhower’s resource policies. McKay, a gaffe-prone administration spokesperson, could not sell an unpopular policy. Oregon voters, already suffering from an economic slump, did not understand why the Republican White House chose to cut national dam building. The Pacific Northwest, after all, had greatly benefited from federal structures such as Washington’s Grand Coulee Dam.⁸

Although Democrats successfully advocated a high Hells Canyon structure in the elections, their success did not translate into congressional action. The Senate defeated the 1956 Hells Canyon bill and only a quid pro quo temporarily saved the measure in 1957. Texas Democrat Lyndon Johnson, the Senate Majority Leader, realized that

7. Elmo Richardson, Dams, Parks and Politics (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1973), 171-186.

8. A. Robert Smith, The Tiger in the Senate: The Biography of Wayne Morse (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1962), 313-320.

authorization of a national edifice in the gorge was impossible. He therefore used the measure as the lure in a vote exchange for the 1957 Civil Rights Act. By the time Johnson's political maneuver was complete, public development was dead.

Fallout from the Hells Canyon debate produced short-term stylistic changes in the Department of the Interior. When White House officials finally realized that McKay had been a lightning rod for administration opponents they began searching for a more polished replacement. The new secretary of the interior, Fred Seaton, was more articulate and moderate than McKay. Praised as a practical politician, Seaton began immediately repairing the department's bruised image. Unlike McKay, he successfully rebutted many giveaway attacks. Seaton set up the Mission 66 and 76 programs, in which state and federal governments developed parks and recreation programs. The new secretary appealed to conservation groups by promising to win revocation of an administration order to reorganize and divide the Fish and Wildlife Service. He also reminded his critics, for example, that his department added four hundred thousand acres to the public land system for conservation efforts.⁹

The Hells Canyon dispute produced few long-term alterations in American resource policy. The controversy did not end national dam building in the region. The Bureau of Reclamation later rebuilt dams and constructed powerhouses at American Falls and Cascade near Idaho Power structures.¹⁰ Subsequent administrations took controversial positions on environmental matters as political debates raged over natural

9. Richardson, Dams, 187-201.

10. *Ibid.*

assets. Both sides asserted their supremacy on the issue of national comprehensive planning for resource management during interminable partisan wrangling for high office. In the years following the Eisenhower presidency, new environmental problems such as acid rain and water pollution confronted Americans. Each new set of resource questions brought its own unique characteristics and produced disputes similar to Hells Canyon.

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