Background

The lower portion of the Snake River, passing through the state of Washington, contains four dams. Constructed between 1961 and 1975, these dams provide benefits related to navigation, hydroelectric power, irrigation, and recreation. Unfortunately, however, they may be harmful to local fish, despite various features designed to aid fish. In 1991, the sockeye salmon (found in the lower Snake River) was listed as an endangered species. In 1995, the National Marine Fisheries Service issued a Biological Opinion listing measures that could be taken to halt and reverse the declines in endangered Snake River fish populations. In response, the Army Corps of Engineers conducted its Lower Snake River Juvenile Salmon Migration Feasibility Study – a detailed analysis of four alternatives associated with the dams.

Your assignment is to investigate the issues, examine the costs, benefits, and implications of the options, and recommend the best course of action. This is to be an objective analysis, considering all sides of the important issues and attempting to determine the best decision for society as a whole.

Getting Started

So much information is available on this subject that one could spend years just reading relevant studies. That is not how you should proceed. Good policy analysis involves identifying the heart of the matter, and conducting only the necessary research to reach the required decision.

A wealth of information is available through the Army Corps website at http://www.nww.usace.army.mil/lsr/. A summary of the Snake River situation and the Executive Summary of Appendix I (Economics) of the Feasibility Study, which summarizes the Corps’ cost-benefit analyses, have already been assigned in the required readings for Block 3. (The full appendix can be found at www.nww.usace.army.mil/lsrf seis/study_kit/appendix_i/appi.htm.) We recommend that you begin by reading these documents and making a list of the issues at stake. You should then identify three key issues that most critically affect the Snake River decision and investigate them further. Your key issues could include, for example, assumptions used in the cost-benefit analysis, or larger policy issues that are absent from the Feasibility Study altogether. Note that you are not required to reproduce or “fix” the Corps’ cost-benefit analysis. You may use or ignore as much or as little of it as you see fit – just be sure to clearly explain what you include in your assessment and why. Remember that this is meant to be an objective analysis, taken for the good of society as a whole. Much more information on the Snake River situation is available; feel free to use any resources you think appropriate.
Deliverables

You are required to turn in a short memo (1 page), summarizing the following:

- how and why you chose your three key issues
- how those issues were analyzed
- what you found
- what you recommend be done about the dams.

Attached to the memo should be an appendix/report with all of the details of your analysis (e.g. data, sources, etc.) Your memo must stand alone, however; you cannot assume anything more will be read – in real life, senior decision-makers rarely have time to read more than the executive summary of a report.

In addition, you should come to class on October 5th prepared to present the following:

- the issues you decided were most important
- your analytical methodology and results
- your recommendations about the dams.

Note: if you are picked to present any of the above, you will have only a few minutes – we just want a very brief summary – so please bring no more than two slides.