HCPC and Hells Canyon Recollections

Boyd Norton

I was very pleased to see Russ Mager's article on the formation and early years of HCPC. If any one person can be credited with saving Hells Canyon it most certainly is Russ. I remember well when we invited him to give that program at the Idaho Alpine Club in March, 1967. His slide show made us realize what an amazing scenic resource was there – one that none of us knew existed until then!

Things moved swiftly after that. Inspired by Russ, we formed the Hells Canyon Preservation Council: Jerry Jayne, Al McGlinsky, Paul Fritz, Cyril Slansky, Jack Barry and myself. Russ was asked to serve as president and did an outstanding job.

Our timing could not have been better, for in the late '60s there was a rising tide of environmental concern. We wrote letters to the Sierra Club and the Wilderness Society asking for help and guidance. Help came from the Sierra Club in the form of a dynamic young lawyer named Brock Evans who was serving as the Pacific Northwest Representative for the club. Brock's help was invaluable. One of his first efforts on our behalf was a petition filed with the Federal Power Commission to intervene in the licensing process to represent the public interest in the case.

In 1968 the Federal Power Commission began to receive an enormous number of letters, written at our behest, urging denial of license for the High Mountain Sheep dam and asking for preservation of the canyon. One of the letter writers was Arthur Godfrey. In November, 1968 I wrote to Arthur thanking him for his support and inviting him to join us on a trip to Hells Canyon in the Spring of '69. He accepted our invitation and did make the trip with Russ Mager and Floyd Harvey. Unfortunately, I was not able to join them, but as Russ described, that trip made Arthur one of the most ardent defenders of Hells Canyon. Here's a copy of Arthur's letter accepting the invitation:

December 18, 1968

Mr. Boyd Norton
Hells Canyon Preservation Council
P. O. Box 691
Idaho Falls, Idaho 83401

Dear Mr. Norton:

I have just returned from an extended tour of appearances in Florida and the Bahamas to find your letter of November 10th, for which I thank you most kindly.

There is nothing I would like better than to make that trip with you in April or early May into Hells Canyon. It all depends upon my professional commitments, however, but I can say definitely at this time that if the television plans work out, that we have in mind, I would like to try to work out with you a special trip which we could photograph professionally for use in one of my television programs later in the year.

Meantime, keep in touch with me at the enclosed private mailing address and let's see what we can work out.

With best wishes.

Sincerely,

Godfrey

AG:ld
Enc.

On his return, Arthur wrote a detailed, five page letter to then Secretary of the Interior Wally Hickel describing the wonders of the canyon he had experienced and pleading with Hickel to join him on his next trip there. I don't recall now whether Hickel went with Godfrey or not – I have an idea he did.

Some of the "old gang" may not remember, but we invited others to see Hells Canyon firsthand. In January 1968 I invited Bobby Kennedy to join us on a trip. I received back a nice reply stating that he couldn't join us but that he might sometime in

the future.

ROBERT F. KENNEDY
NEW YORK

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20510

January 24, 1968

Mr. Boyd E. Norton
Hells Canyon Preservation Council
Post Office Box 691
Idaho Falls, Idaho 83401

Dear Mr. Norton:

Thank you for your kind invitation to join you on a boat-hiking trip beginning on April 17th and ending on April 20th.

Although I would very much like to be with you for this event, my schedule is such that I will not be able to attend. I appreciate your thoughtfulness in inviting me, and perhaps I will be able to join you another time.

With best wishes,

Sincerely,

RFK

Robert F. Kennedy

Six months later he was assassinated.

In late 1969 I was in New York and dropped in to the offices of Audubon Magazine. Audubon was publishing my article and photo essay on Hells Canyon in their January, 1970 issue. My timing was perfect, for the editor, Les Line, had just received color page proofs of my article and he gave me several sets. I jumped on the next shuttle flight to Washington and set up an appointment with a young, newly elected senator from Oregon, Bob Packwood. It was Brock Evans who steered us on to Packwood, pointing out that, for a Republican, he had a very liberal outlook and seemed very conservation oriented. And at that time, we needed a sponsor for the Hells Canyon bill that Brock had drafted for us.

I sat in Packwood's office and we discussed the issue. Then I pulled out the Audubon color page proofs and carefully laid them out on his desk. He leaned forward and studied each photo carefully, turning the pages slowly. Then he looked up.

What he said next should be chiseled in granite and made a monument on the rim of Hells Canyon. He said, "Holy shit! Is this in my state?"

Packwood went on to introduce our bill. Arthur Godfrey continued to help. At our urging he agreed to testify at the Senate Subcommittee hearings on the Hells Canyon bill held in Washington in September 1971. I met with Arthur in New York a month before and I agreed to draft his statement for him. When I met him in the hallway of the Senate office building, on the day of the hearing, he was very nervous. I was surprised because for many years he had been a big star of radio and television and surely he couldn't be nervous about speaking before a Senate hearing. But he was. Nonethless, he did a great job and his appearance there resulted in great media coverage.

As a final note, I should mention that even though I wrote a first draft of Arthur's testimony, he made substantial changes. When he testified he made a point of saying that not only should Hells Canyon be spared any more dams, but that *all other dams elsewhere be removed.* His statement brought howls of protest from the pork barrel dam promoters and in particular Arthur took a lot of heat from Senator Mark Hatfield of Oregon. But he stuck to his guns. I must admit that his statement seemed a bit shocking, even to those of us who considered ourselves somewhat radical. But today, thirty six years later, there are now serious discussions about removing many, if not most of the damaging dams around the country. We should start with all of those on the Snake River.

In August of 1972 I had the pleasure of accompanying Pete Seeger on a raft trip through Hells Canyon. The trip was organized by Friends of the Earth. On the journey Pete wrote at least one song about Hells Canyon and I'm hoping to locate a tape recording someone made when he sang it again on our last night in Lewiston.