

HCPC I and Citizen Action  
By Russ Mager

As the first HCPC President, I thought this would be a good time to supplement Brock Evan's four part series of articles: "The Hells Canyon Story," which came to a close in the October 2006 **Falcon**. Brock has done HCPC II a big favor in taking the time, effort and care in writing of his work as a Sierra Club attorney assigned to the Hells Canyon case. His enthusiasm for the cause was as much evident then as it is now. I deeply appreciate Greg Dyson on giving me the opportunity to write as I asked him to do so.

In June 1967, the U.S. Supreme Court, with Justice William O. Douglas giving the majority opinion, ruled that conservation and recreation values be given equal weight in the Federal Power Commission's analysis of whether to build a dam in the Hells Canyon region of the Snake River. This decision and the order to hold a new trial, was, in effect, a challenge to environmental groups to state their case against construction of a dam. At this crucial time, up pops the Sierra Club and its newly appointed legal eagle attorney, Brock Evans. Equally important, up popped the Hells Canyon Preservation Council in Idaho Falls with the big job of creating citizen action to save the Hells Canyon. Idaho Falls is the home of the Idaho Alpine Club. I met some of their members for the first time in Boise in the winter of 1966-67, all of us giving oral testimony at a U.S. Forest Service hearing on another issue concerning the Middle Fork of the Salmon River, as I recall. So at that time, I got to know these highly educated young men. Hoping to stimulate their interest in Hells Canyon, I offered to present my slide show about Hells Canyon. My family, friends and I took numerous horse-packing trips into the adjacent Seven Devil's Lake area for fly-fishing. Also, my son Ron and I rode our horses down to the river for sturgeon fishing several times. We went by way of Cold Springs Lookout, Low Saddle, Sheep Creek, Johnson's Bar to the mouth of Bernard Creek, where we camped by the hay rake. We were awed by the remoteness, the wild beauty of this deepest of North American canyons with its mighty Snake River and deep rumble of many falls. A dam here was unthinkable. But the reality was otherwise as the Federal Power Commission wanted to do exactly that. The time for citizen action had come.

On March 1<sup>st</sup>, 1967, my slide show was presented to the Idaho Alpine Club. A few weeks after the Supreme Court decision in June of '67 several members of the Club met in Idaho Falls to discuss the matter. I was asked to serve as President because of my first hand knowledge of the area. On July 19, 1967, the first organizing meeting was held at my home in Pocatello, Idaho. Present beside myself was Jerry Jane, Boyd Norton, Paul Fritz, Al McGlinsky, Cyril Slansky and Jim Campbell. Our bumper sticker motto would be "Save Hells Canyon". The following month we were legally incorporated with the volunteer help of Idaho Falls attorney, Reg Reeves. We did not have an office or secretary, just a post office box in Idaho Falls, which remained the case during the eight years' life of the council. Frankly, I was amazed by the zeal, focus and speed with which this talented small group of volunteers developed HCPC into an independent and powerful voice to create citizen action to save Hells Canyon. While all of this was happening in Idaho Falls, the Executive Committee of the Pacific Northwest Chapter of the Sierra Club, asked their Northwest Representative, who just happened to be attorney Brock Evans, to "look into" the Hells Canyon issue. His job was to represent the Sierra Club in all legal matters such as with the Federal Power Commission. Also, he was to support and promote citizen action particularly in Oregon, Washington and Idaho. Sierra Club action to save Hells Canyon was spurred by activist Floyd Harvey, a Lewiston businessman. Floyd was a true friend of HCPC even including opening his home to four or five of us who were at a hearing in Lewiston. Also he hosted a visit by Arthur Godfrey to his recreation camp at Willow Creek in the Canyon. Further, Floyd promoted HCPC membership in the Lewiston area. After about four years the tempo of activities escalated so I decided to step down as President so that Pete Henault of Idaho Falls could take over.

Going back to 1969, we had the task of drawing up the borders of the area that needed protection – no small job. To buy stamps, stationary, etc. we were awarded a modest grant from the American Heritage Foundation. Rather than a top-down organization, we operated as an executive group, which permitted flexibility. The Idaho Falls members basically ran the program, while in Pocatello, I answered letters, wrote to Senators, Congressmen and wrote an article for The Wilderness Society. My wonderful, wonderful wife, Marian, typed all of my correspondence and reports. She was as much of a volunteer for HCPC as I was. On a family trip to Washington D.C., I took time off to talk with Congressman John Saylor, a strong supporter of saving Hells Canyon. Also, I well remember a talk with Dr. Edgar Weyburn, President of the Sierra Club for many years, Mike McClosky, the new Director and Paul Fritz, Superintendent of the Craters of the Moon National Monument at his office. HCPC was able to get NBC to do a Huntley-Binkley documentary of the Canyon. I was invited to go along for a nationally televised interview at the mouth of the Salmon River. While going up the river, we encountered a fisherman catching a very large sturgeon. (*See photo*). Somebody quipped that the monster fish probably resulted in more citizen action than anything else. The sturgeon was immediately returned to the water after the picture.

On that very same day in late July of '69, Floyd Harvey took me from Pittsburgh landing, where I left the NBC crew, to his camp at Willow Creek to meet Arthur Godfrey who was visiting the Canyon. (*See photo*). During the 50's, 60's and 70's, Arthur Godfrey was a superstar of radio and television with his daily shows. What a break for HCPC that he fell in love with the Canyon. His millions of listeners were frequently reminded by Godfrey to talk to or write their Senators and Congressmen to save Hells Canyon. He wrote an eloquent letter to the Federal Power Commission. I helicoptered out of the canyon with Arthur to Lewiston where he flew his Lear jet back to New York City.

The primary challenge to HCPC was to engender enough citizen support to sway congressional action in favor of protecting the Canyon from any dam. This became a reality on the last day of December 1975 when President Ford signed the Hells Canyon NRA into law.

On a personal note, I am a mostly blind 89-year old codger. My wife Marian and I have been married for 65 years. We have four children, nine grandchildren and 10 great-grandchildren. In addition to my career in the human services such as being Director of Special Services for the Community School Project in Pocatello, Idaho, I am a retired Air Force pilot with active duty service before, during and after World War II. Then I served in the Active Reserve.

Today, many more environmental problems compete for public attention. To accomplish anything in the environmental field, a professional approach is an absolute necessity with supporting volunteers. Personally I am thrilled by the progress HCPC II has made to protect and preserve Hells Canyon for present and future generations to enjoy.