Pacific Salmon, Immigration, and Censors

Unreliability of the Cowed Technocrat

BY STUART H. HURLBERT

In the popular imagination, the Pacific Northwest of the U.S. is a region where the populace and the politicians often are more "green" or environment-friendly than is the case in most other parts of the U.S. To dispel that myth brings no pleasure.

In 2005 I was appointed to a three-year term as member of the Independent Scientific Advisory Board (ISAB) for the Columbia River Basin. The function of this board is "to provide independent scientific advice and recommendations regarding scientific issues posed by the respective agencies on matters that relate to their fish and wildlife programs." The respective agencies are the Northwest Power and Conservation Council (NWPCC), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries, and the Columbia River Basin Indian Tribes (http://www.nwcouncil.org/about/Default.htm). Salmon biology, fisheries, and conservation are major foci.

The NWPCC "was created by Congress to give the citizens of Idaho, Montana, Oregon and Washington a stronger voice in determining the future of key resources common to all four states — namely, the electricity generated at and fish and wildlife affected by the Columbia River Basin hydropower dams." The Council is made up of eight persons, two appointed by each of the governors of the four above states.

My enthusiasm for joining the ISAB had three sources. First, the idea of working outside academia with a diverse and very bright group of senior scientists on big, real-world problems. Second, an affection for and knowledge of salmon residual from the summers of 1959 and 1960 when I had worked in Alaska as a salmon tagger on migration studies in Bristol Bay. And third, my understanding that the ISAB was about to undertake a white paper on human population growth and problems posed by it to the fish and wildlife of the region, that my expertise on U.S. population trends was greater than that of other ISAB members and would be useful, and that most U.S. scientific and environmental organizations in recent decades have been afraid to touch this critical topic (Beck and Kolankiewicz, 2000, Hurlbert, 2000, 2011a, b, c, Meyerson, 2004).

We began work on that white paper in 2006. Skittishness among my colleagues was soon in evidence. In February 2007 I submitted many pages of ideas, text, and tables for possible incorporation into our report. The concept of demotechnic growth was presented, factual material pertinent to future population trajectories in the region and the U.S. was summarized, and eight new references were provided.

The concept of demotechnic growth was the brainchild of noted Canadian limnologist Jack Vallentyne. The term refers to the synergy of demographic (population) growth and technological growth, or increase in per capita consumption of resources and generation of waste products (Vallentyne, 1972a, b, 2006, Vallentyne and Tracy, 1972, Mata et al. 1994, Vallentyne, 2006, Schindler, 2000, Schindler and Vallentyne,

The late Canadian Limnologist Jack Vallentyne

Stuart H. Hurlbert *is an emeritus professor of biology at San Diego State University and is currently secretary of Californians for Population Stabilization. Contact: shurlbert@sunstroke.sdsu.edu*

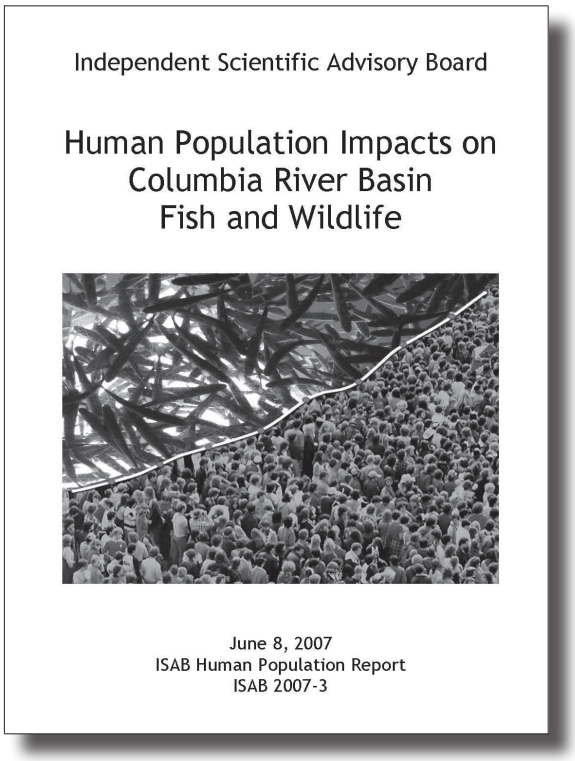
2008, Hurlbert, 2011d). The genius of the concept is its recognition that per capita energy consumption is as good and straightforward a measure of per capita impact on the environment as we are ever likely to have. Information on such energy consumption rates is tabulated for all countries by the United Nations. This allows the environmental impact of each country to be viewed as a function of not its population size but but rather its "consumption adjusted population," properly shifting more responsibility onto the wealthier nations.

A majority of my fellow ISAB members felt that the demotechnic framework and other material presented did not even merit discussion. So these were summarily dismissed. That the U.S. Senate had passed in May 2006 a "comprehensive immigration reform" bill (SB2611) that would have roughly doubled the rate of U.S. population growth (Martin and Fogel, 2006), if it had made it into law, had no great relevance to the future of salmon or the Columbia River ecosystem. Nor did the fact that three senators who had voted for it were, by 2007, the leading U.S. presidential candidates for the November 2008 election — Sen. Hilary Clinton, Sen. John McCain, and Sen. Barack Obama. Nor was it relevant that seven of the eight senators from the states represented on the NWPCC also voted for SB2611.

It would be somehow improper for an "independent" ISAB to point out that large reductions in immigration were both feasible and would redound greatly to the benefit of the Columbia River Basin ecosystem over the medium and long term. No, the politicians had to be given cover and inconvenient facts kept under wraps. Lackey's (2003) advice that "Salmon technocrats need to be constantly on guard to avoid being drawn into the role of providing political cover for decisions makers" was being ignored with a vengeance.

Not least of these inconvenient facts was the true impact of immigration on recent population growth. ISAB (2007, p. 4) states, "Natural growth accounts for 60 percent of the U.S. population increase, with the remaining 40 percent due to net immigration, both legal and illegal." Incomplete bibliographic citations make it unclear exactly what time period those numbers refer to. One can infer from the reference cited, however, that they must come from Table 4 in USCB (2005). That table shows that for the period July 2000-July 2003, "net immigration" accounted for 45 percent of U.S. population growth. Worse than a possible error of 5 percent, however, was the deceptive use of the concept of "net immigration" (= immigrants minus emigrants, over any defined time period).

When analyzing the effects of immigration policies or rates on past or future population growth, it is immigrants *plus their descendants* that is the only honest measure of immigration's demographic consequences.



Most ISAB authors were unwilling to have the report reflect that fact. Good estimates were available. Post-2000 immigrants and their descendants were estimated to account for 62 percent of the 12.2 million people added to the U.S. population between 2000 and 2004 (Lee et al., 2005); for the period 2000-2006, that figure rose to 77 percent (J. Martin, email to S.H., June 11, 2007). More recently, Passel and Cohn (2008) project that if current fertility and immigration trends continue, the U.S. population will increase to 438 million by 2050, with 82 percent of that increase being due to post-2005 immigrants and their descendants.

Presentation of data on "net immigration" in these contexts is simply a transparent ploy to make the demographic impact of immigration seem less than it is.

The draft report was becoming so misleading on such matters that I requested my name be kept off the title page.

The final report, *Human population impacts on Columbia River Basin fish and wildlife* (ISAB, 2007), was released on June 8, 2007. Jack Vallentyne died eight days later, happily unaware of my failed efforts on behalf of honest demotechnics. Not realizing that he was terminally ill, I had spoken with Vallentyne a few months before his death to thank and congratulate him for his new book, *Tragedy in Mouse Utopia: An Ecolog-*

ical Commentary on Human Utopia (Vallentye 2006), promising to help spread its message.

Later, it became known through a reliable "grapevine" that at least seven of the eight members of the NWPCC did not want the Council to be pushed into population issues in any way. So presumably they were happy with an ISAB report that did not "put a ball into their court" on the matter. One cannot blame them. When decision makers suspect that, if they make a courageous decision or take a courageous stand on a difficult issue, they will have minimal back-up support from the putative experts, such courage will not be displayed. Better to survive politically and live to fight other battles, will be the rationale, weak as it is.

Alert members of the environmental community were quick to note the report's reticence. Five days after it came out, Dick Schneider (email to S.H., 13 June 2007), former chairman of the Population Committee of the San Francisco Bay Chapter of the Sierra Club, wrote me:

> [ISAB, 2007] is disappointing to say the least. Not one of its recommendations seeks to curtail population growth, which the report correctly identifies as the underlying cause of threats to fish and wildlife. Instead, the report simply recommends accommodating projected growth in the least damaging ways. Of course, that will be inadequate in the long run, since the tentacles of denser human settlements will invade, enwrap, and squeeze the life out of nearby natural environments. At least when the California Department of Finance makes population projections, it provides a candid disclaimer (although it stops there):
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> > These population projections depict only one possible course of future population change, i.e., the one reflecting recent trends in fertility, mortality, and migration. These projections do not necessarily show what is most desirable but rather what can be reasonably expected if current trends continue until the year 2050.
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> One might have hoped that the ISAB would have made a statement at least as cautious as this, if not actually recommending ways to curtail population growth.

On September 12-13, 2007, the NWPCC held a Science Policy Exchange meeting in Portland, Oregon for the purpose of reviewing scientific and management issues in the Columbia River Basin and having discussion of them among Council members, ISAB members, Independent Scientific Review Panel members, and other interested parties from government agencies, non-governmental organizations, the regional tribes and others. On the second day there were presentations on the Columbia River estuary, its importance to all salmon stocks in the basin, its damaged state (filled in wetlands, contaminants, etc.), and ongoing restoration efforts (e.g., Bottom, 2007, Levings, 2007, Marriott, 2007). It was noted that the estuary and lower river would be much more threatened by further human population growth than would be either the salmon's oceanic or upriver habitats.

During the discussion period I asked a question along the lines (my notes are a little cryptic) of whether the magnitude of the manifold threats posed by population growth to the Columbia River estuary in particular should cause the NWPCC to take a stand in favor of slowing population growth rather than just sticking with its silent, accommodationist stance even as Congress toyed with the idea of greatly increasing the rate of U.S. population growth. The moderator, Rick Williams, ruled my question out of order, forbid responses and went on to questions of a more proper technocratic nature. The official report of the meeting (Williams, 2007) includes questions and responses from the discussion periods. My question is missing from the report of course, as is *any* indication that U.S. population policies are relevant to salmon and deserving of honest discussion in such settings.

In a follow-up report (Hanna, 2008) on "the institutional challenge of integrating salmon ecosystems and human systems in ways that effectively promote resilience" in the Columbia River basin, there likewise was zero mention of human population stabilization, let alone population reduction, as an economically and politically feasible and environmentally desirable route for promoting "resilience." Indeed, the only sentence in that article referring to population growth simply says it is one of those "changes at larger scales [that]…may limit options at smaller regional scales."

But the salmon are not completely without blunter truth-telling friends in the scientific community to the North. A few Canadian or Canadian-born scientists have made clear that the future of the already greatly damaged Pacific salmon populations is indeed bleak if reliance continues to be placed solely on technological fixes and tweakings of our lifestyles, and we do not reduce the high, immigration-driven, U.S. and Canadian population growth rates (e.g. Salonius, 1999, Hartman et al., 2000, 2006, Ashley, 2006, Lackey, 2003, 2009, Lackey et al., 2006). As Lackey (2009) puts it:

> Over the past 135 years there have been many salmon recovery plans. …None of these plans has much of a chance of achieving its publicly stated goal. … If society wishes to do anything meaningful about moving wild salmon off their current long-term downward trend, then something must be done about the unrelenting growth in the human population level along the West Coast. …Assuming likely reproductive rates and continuing immigration to the Pacific Northwest, in 2100 this region's human population will be [up from the present 15 million to] somewhere between 50 million and 100 million…

Cowed technocrats, whether driven by ignorance, fear, or reckless utopianism, cannot be trusted. They function as accommodationist servants to those political groups favoring mass immigration and endless population growth. They are not reliable allies in the hard battle for a better environmental future for salmon or people. ■

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