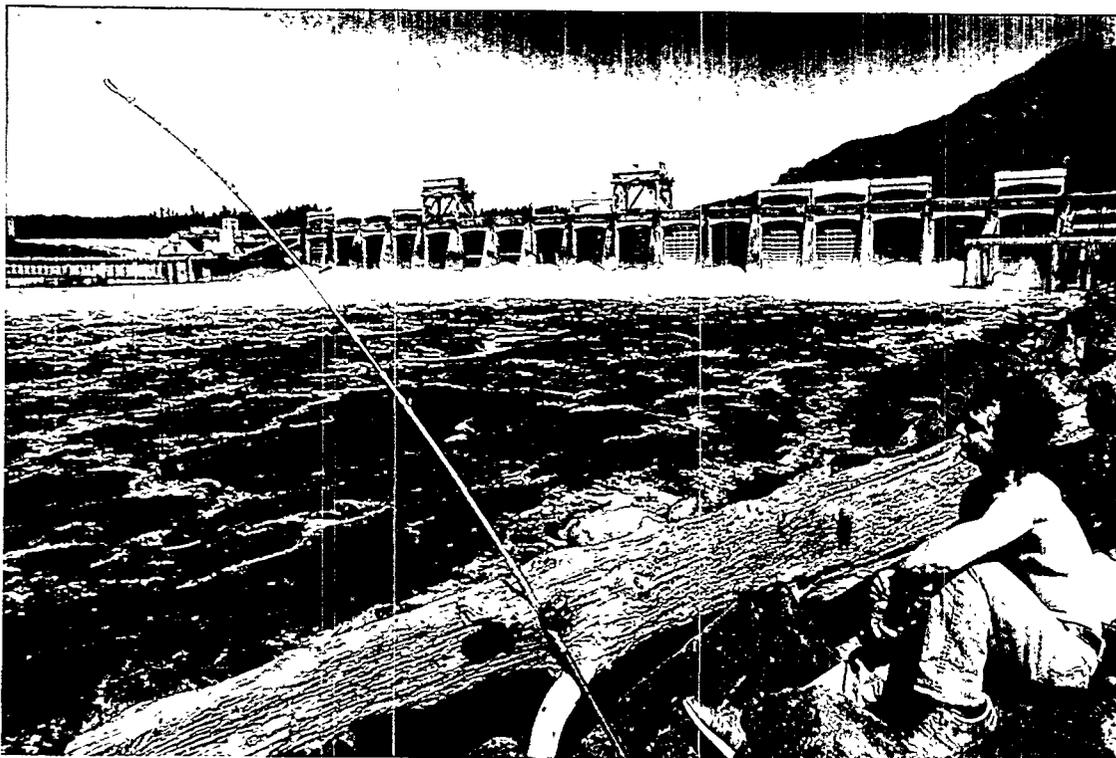


Often “energy policy” became intertwined with other federal policies and programs. During the Great Depression the Army Corps of Engineers, the Tennessee Valley Authority, and the Interior Department’s Bureau of Reclamation built multipurpose dams that not only generated power but also promoted conservation, reclamation, and recreation. The Bonneville Dam, which the Corps built in the 1930s on the Columbia River about thirty-five miles east of Portland, Oregon, epitomized federal energy policy. The Bonneville Dam was constructed to stimulate the regional economy and to produce inexpensive electrical energy. Meanwhile, Bonneville contributed to national security by providing reliable power to the aluminum, aircraft, and other defense industries located in the Pacific Northwest. The project was also important for flood control, irrigation, and navigation. Nevertheless, large concrete dams significantly altered the environment, particularly by blocking upstream migration of spawning fish. At Bonneville, the Corps built ingenious fish ladders and channels to help migratory fish around the seventy-foot-high dam. Although never comprising a comprehensive national energy strategy, the Federal

Government’s dam-building policy did promote low energy prices, stimulate local economies, and evidence concern for conservation and recreation.⁴

In an era when energy resources were perceived as almost boundless, the limited role of the Federal Government as a cautious energy broker seemed to suit the needs of the country. The American people did not call upon their government to make hard decisions about America’s energy future. To be sure, conflicts between energy systems and the environment forecast the difficult and bitter choices that lay ahead. Furthermore, the Nation experienced some energy shortages, especially in the great blackout of 1965 and the “brownout” of 1971. In his first energy message to Congress in 1971, President Richard M. Nixon warned that the United States could no longer take its energy supply for granted. Since 1967, Nixon observed, America’s rate of energy consumption had outpaced the Nation’s production of goods and services. To help private enterprise develop an adequate supply of clean energy for the future, the President asked Congress to establish a department of natural resources



Fisherman enjoying recreational activities at Bonneville Dam.

Source: U.S. Department of Energy