Salmon headed upstream. (Photo by US
EPA)

For most of two decades, environmentalists have sought removal of four federal dams on the
Lower Snake River for the sake of the northwest's wild salmon runs. So far, they have been
stymied by the agencies that operate the dams — the Corps of Engineers and Bonneville
Power Administration — and local utility and industry interests. But now, Ken Olsen writes
in High Country News, the political tides may be shifting.

> Some of those formidable obstacles to dam removal remain, but there are signs
> that the balance is tipping. President Barack Obama appears dedicated to
> science and transparency; a well-respected fisheries scientist is now in charge of
> a key federal agency; and new Northwestern politicians have signaled their
> willingness to help solve the salmon crisis. Some eastern Washington farmers
> and other dam beneficiaries appear willing to contemplate a future without the
> four Snake dams, and renewables in the region already produce as much
> electricity as these dams provide. A ban on commercial salmon fishing along the
> Oregon and California coasts for the second consecutive year will cost fishing
> communities hundreds of millions of dollars, adding urgency to salmon
> restoration. Most of all, Judge Redden is determined to make government
> agencies finally follow the Endangered Species Act.

Olsen emphasizes the importance of Obama's appointment of people with strong
environmental credentials to key posts, notably Jane Lubchenco as head of NOAA, and Jo-
Ellen Darcy, the nominee to head the Corps of Engineers and a long-time congressional
staffer, most recently chief environmental advisor to the Senate finance committee.
Opposition from BPA, he believes, is the most significant hurdle to dam removal, but with
Judge Redden demanding that a plan for dam removal be developed if salmon do not show

signs of recovery in the next few years, even that formidable obstacle may be surmountable.

Olsen's full story is well worth reading.