

August 25, 2006

## A (Terror) Fish Story

We've been fascinated by the story of how Jim Bensman of Alton, Ill., went to a hearing about fish and wound up as a potential terrorism suspect.

[As Cornelia Dean reported in The Times](#), the Army Corps of Engineers held a meeting in Mr. Bensman's neighborhood to talk about helping those fish swim around the locks and dams it has constructed on the Mississippi River over the years. There was a PowerPoint presentation on various options. One — clearly not the Corps's favorite — was to eliminate a dam in East Alton. To illustrate that idea, the presentation included a picture of a dam being dynamited.

Mr. Bensman rose later to support removing the dam. Big mistake.

A local paper reported that Mr. Bensman told the Corps he “would like to see the dam blown up.”

A Corps security officer read the report. He decided that Mr. Bensman was threatening a public facility. He notified the G-men.

An F.B.I. agent then contacted Mr. Bensman, who was surprised to learn that federal investigators believed a terrorist might announce his plans at a public hearing of the Army Corps of Engineers.

When the agent said he wanted to visit his home, it occurred to Mr. Bensman that he needed a lawyer. At that point, Mr. Bensman said, the agent threatened to “put you down as not cooperating.”

All this started because Mr. Bensman believes the Army Corps builds way too many locks and dams on the Mississippi for the convenience of boating interests. This page has always thought so too.

But not in any way, shape or form that involves any kind of sabotage whatsoever.

[Home](#)

- [World](#)
- [U.S.](#)

- [N.Y. / Region](#)
  - [Business](#)
  - [Technology](#)
    - [Science](#)
    - [Health](#)
    - [Sports](#)
  - [Opinion](#)
    - [Arts](#)
    - [Style](#)
    - [Travel](#)
    - [Jobs](#)
  - [Real Estate](#)
  - [Automobiles](#)
  - [Back to Top](#)

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