

EDITORIAL

Blow up over dam was way out of line

Jim Bensman is a lover of nature. He's made no secret of that fact through the years and is in fact a little zealous when it comes to environmental concerns. He pulls no punches about the need to protect wildlife, trees, the river and such. He is a man of opinion. Good for him.

Alton people know that, of course, from the dozens of times he's offered his comments — from letters to the editor to public meetings.

We suspect that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers knows him, too, if not before July 25, then certainly since that time. That was the night

Corps, FBI have better things to do

the Corps was soliciting public opinion on a proposed fish passage at the Melvin Price Locks and Dam.

Bensman gave his opinion: He stood up and said he wouldn't mind seeing Locks and Dam 26 blown up. He said he resents paying taxes to fix dam problems when it is barge companies that profit from dams.

There are many ways to interpret such talk, but anybody who knows Bensman knows what he meant. Dams are restrictive devices. They blockade water. They disrupt natural surroundings. The best thing to do

with them is remove them, and the way you do that is to blow them up.

Not that Mr. Bensman would push the plunger, mind you.

The Telegraph duly reported his comment and considered it so non-controversial that it was in the seventh paragraph of the next day's story. It wasn't even the lead.

So it was, a few days later, that the Alton man got a call from the FBI, asking him about the newspaper article and his terrorist intentions. To say Bensman was flabbergasted would be an understatement.



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The Corps had sent the story to its district staff, which then contacted the FBI.

All this is a little mind-boggling. After all, nary a terrorist of the modern age would stand up at a government meeting, so why would the FBI ever have gotten involved? Why, if there was any question, wouldn't the Corps district staff simply go back to officials who

were at the meeting and ask them what was going on? Listen to the meeting tape? Read the minutes?

Bensman has never been a Corps ally and one could reasonably suspect that all this attention is a little gig over his attitude. Until we know for sure, though, we'll simply chalk it up to the Corps' own zealousness. Certainly officials have other things to do — blowing up dams for example.

Meanwhile, Mr. Bensman should be given a little more credit. He's no terrorist. Not by a dam site.

TOMORROW: Increasing post-prison penalties for sex crimes