

State lawmakers push for dam safety

TRACY LOEW
STATESMAN JOURNAL

Oregon's "high hazard potential" dams would get stepped up inspections and would be required to develop emergency action plans under a bill introduced Monday in the Oregon House.

House Bill 3427, sponsored by Silverton Rep. Rick Lewis, would require emergency exercises to be conducted at high-hazard dams at regular intervals. And it would require the Oregon Water Resources Department to conduct periodic examinations of those dams.

Under current law, high-hazard dams are encouraged to have an emergency action plan, Lewis said. House Bill 3427 would require one.

"Having an emergency action plan and consistency in safety inspections is crucial to emergency preparedness for dams that are high hazard," Lewis said in a statement. "Oregonians who live below or

within proximity of one of the numerous high-hazard dams in our state should have confidence in their level of safety."

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers maintains the public National Inventory of Dams (NID) database.

It classifies some dams as "high hazard potential," meaning dam failure could result in the loss of at least one human life, and likely would result in property or environmental destruction. Other dams are classified as "significant hazard potential," "low hazard potential," or "undetermined."

In February, following the crisis at Oroville Dam in California, the Statesman Journal reported that of the 869 Oregon dams in the NID database, 150 are rated "high hazard potential."

Twenty-four of those high-hazard dams are operating without emergency action plans, documents that lay out everything from inundation



ANNA REED / STATESMAN JOURNAL

The upper Big Creek Reservoir near Newport is one of seven dams in Oregon that have been deemed "unsatisfactory" by the Oregon Water Resources Department.

maps to notification flowcharts to emergency response duties.

Oregon considers seven high-hazard dams to be in "unsatisfactory" condition, meaning they could be declared unsafe if re-

pairs aren't made.

In Marion and Polk counties, high hazard dams include Franzen Reservoir, Silver Creek Dam, Croft Reservoir and Mercer Reservoir.

Detroit Lake in Linn

County, which supplies Salem's drinking water, is a high-hazard dam. It does have an emergency action plan.

The House Committee on Veterans and Emergency Preparedness has

Oregon's troubled dams

Oregon considers seven Oregon dams to be in unsatisfactory condition:

» Big Creek Reservoir #1 (Lower) Dam, in Lincoln County (21 feet high).

» Big Creek Reservoir #2 (Upper) Dam in Lincoln County (56 feet high).

» Crowley Dam in Malheur County (90 feet high)

» Willow Creek 3 in Malheur County (110 feet high)

» Ferry Creek Dam in Curry County (65 feet high).

» McMullen Dam in Josephine County (33 feet high).

» Johnson Creek Dam in Crook County (44 feet high).

scheduled a public hearing on the bill at 3 p.m. Tuesday in Hearing Room E at the Capitol.

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Aurora man sentenced for hiding dad's body

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Fitchett

February after Marion County Sheriff's Office deputies discover the body of

Henry Conley Fitchett Jr., 87, stashed in a freezer next to Edward's trailer.

Another family member reported Henry missing on Jan. 29. Neighbors reported last seeing Henry between August 2015 and early 2016, but Edward insisted he lived with his father until August 2016.

He told deputies his fa-

ther had moved in with his girlfriend. Four months earlier, however, he told his landlord his father went to live with his brother in eastern Oregon.

A local doctor's office last treated Henry in December 2015. In August, a person claiming to be Henry called the office, said they were fine and no longer needed treatment.

Investigators discovered Henry was still receiving about \$2,000 a month in retirement funds from PERS and social security payments. Edward admitted to

spending the money on personal purchases through Amazon, rent, electricity bills and storage payments.

The conflicting stories and Edward's admission of theft led deputies to serve a search warrant at Edward's home on the 21300 block of Hubbard Cutoff Road NE. They found Henry, naked and sealed in a bag inside the freezer.

An Oregon State Medical Examiners Office autopsy determined Fitchett died of natural causes in December 2015.

Edward told investiga-

tors he put his father's body in the fridge but declined to give further details.

He was arrested and charged with second-degree abuse of a corpse and 13 counts of first-degree theft.

In each theft count, he was accused of stealing more than \$1,000 on at least 13 occasions from January 2016 to January 2017.

In a notice filed in Marion County, prosecutor Keir Boettcher stated Edward has demonstrated a violation of trust, was part of an organized criminal

operation and showed a lack of remorse. He also identified Henry as a vulnerable victim and his son's action cause great harm.

As part of his sentence, Edward was also ordered to pay for his father's funeral and to pay further restitution. The remaining charges were dismissed.

For questions, comments and news tips, email reporter Whitney Woodworth at wwoodworth@statesmanjournal.com, call 503-399-6884 or follow on Twitter @wwoodworth

Senate chooses osprey over meadowlark as state bird

DIANE DIETZ
STATESMAN JOURNAL

A proposal to dump the western meadowlark in favor of the osprey for the Oregon state bird flew through the Senate this week, drawing lofty rhetoric from lawmakers.

"The osprey is like Oregon," Sen. Elizabeth Steiner Hayward said. "We are fierce. We are independent. We are ubiquitous across our state. You can find an osprey nesting along any body of water in this entire state whether it's urban or rural.

"You can see osprey. They're big. They're obvious. They have a unique flight patterns. They're fascinating to watch, and they can engage people in a way that a small bird — that's tough to see — cannot engage people."

Now the state bird bill, Senate Concurrent Resolution 18, awaits action in the House, likely in May.

Sen. Fred Girod, a fisherman and Republican senator from Stayton, introduced the bill. He said meadowlarks are too small — scarcely bigger

than a robin — and not much to see, if they're even around, which is seldom.

The osprey, a fish-eating bird of prey, on the other hand, has a 5-foot wingspan, and they are clever fishers, diving headfirst into the water and cleverly calculating their target despite the water's misleading lens, he said.

Defenders of the meadowlark and its song, which the Cornell Ornithology Lab calls a "buoyant, flute-like melody,"

say if the state dumps the meadowlark Oregon will be turning its back on a vulnerable species, which is losing its habitat and dwindling in numbers.

Audubon members point to Oregon's cultural history involving the meadowlark. In 1927, the bird-watching organization asked Oregon school kids to vote on a bird to represent the state. In addition to the meadowlark, they had the western bluebird, varied thrush, Oregon junco, white-crowned sparrow to choose from, according to the testimony of a Eugene bird watcher.

The children "rallied around a delicate little songbird as our state bird," Sen. Betsy Johnson, D-Scappoose, said in an impassioned defense of the meadowlark.

But Girod said the meadowlark was never officially made the Oregon state bird.

By fiat, governor Isaac Patterson made it so by proclamation. The Legislature never weighed in, he said.

"The major problem with the meadowlark is that it's the state bird for five other states. (Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota and Wyoming) That's just not the Oregon way," Girod said.

But Chris Thomas of Eugene testified that simply swapping out the meadowlark for the osprey "ignores and disrespects the rich history" of the meadowlark's rise in Oregon.

"The 'Oregon' thing to do would respect the past and embrace the future, let Meadowlark be voted down, ratified or given the chance to stand for reelection as incumbent against osprey, duck or whatever, in a new poll of Oregon schoolchildren," he said.

Audubon chapters across Oregon volunteered to sponsor a new poll of schoolchildren to settle the matter.

Much of the debate in the Senate was on the surface about the birds but other issues lurked just beneath the surface. English majors will be able to

spot the subtext.

"Maybe this bill is indicative of the spirit of this session when we move to replace an iconic herbivore with a dominant carnivore," she said.

"We offer up this gentle avian friend into the talons of a raptor with precious little public process," Johnson said on the Senate floor.

"(We) drive a dagger through the soft downy breast of this feathered harbinger of spring. We should be ashamed. ...

"We should consult the public. Don't validate the caprice of possibly well-intended individuals who wish to replace this gentle presence with a fierce predator and an instinctual killer who visits death on fish from above. I beg you to maintain the melodic song of the meadowlark."

Sen. Brian Boquist, R-Dallas, said he hadn't intended to speak on the subject but "was moved by the rapturous speech by my fellow colleague about the dark-of-the-night (legislation)."

But it's too early, he said. "We're not halfway through session. We'll be doing the dark-of-night things in rules committee around the seventh or eighth of July."

The decision about the bird included public notice and testimony and followed the appropriate process. As a Republican in a state where Democrats hold the governorship, the Senate and the House, Boquist said he pays attention to due process. "We know what the railroad looks like, at least when it runs over us."

Just before the vote, Republican Girod tried to turn his outsider status into an asset, at least for the sake of elevating the osprey.

"Most of you for a long time have had strong feelings about me," Girod told his colleagues. "Give me what you've always wanted to give me: Elevate the bird."

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