

Northwest hydropower study due in five years

Irrigators criticize process as waste of time, money

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

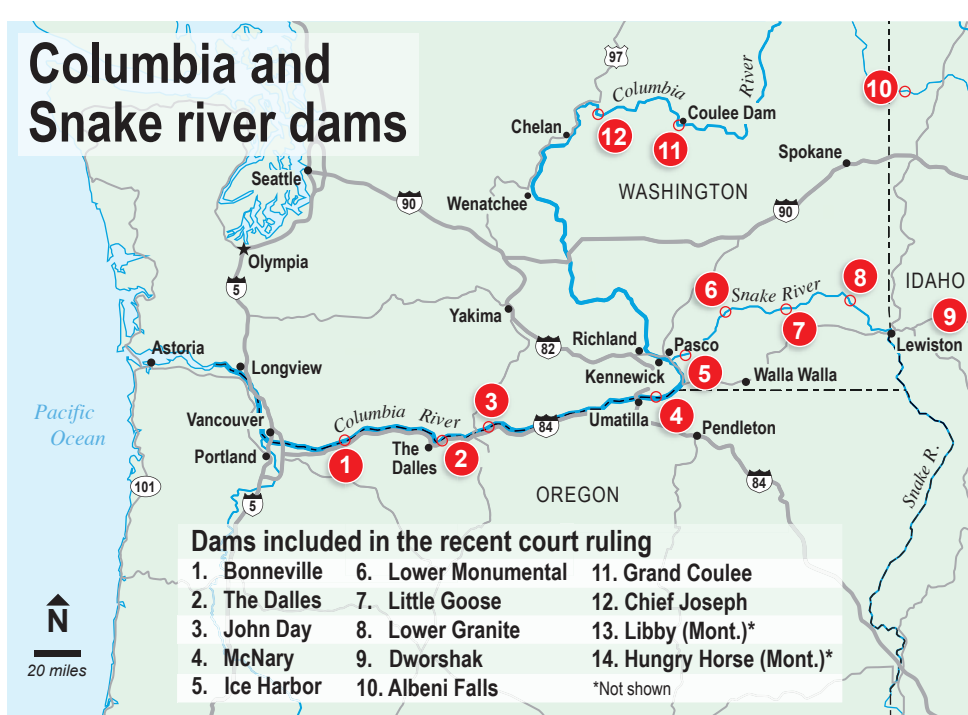
Federal authorities have five years to study changes in the operation of 14 Northwest hydropower facilities aimed at mitigating harms to threatened and endangered fish.

Environmental groups had called for a shorter deadline but they're optimistic the process will compel federal agencies to come up with more aggressive operational changes.

Irrigators who depend on electricity from the hydropower dams, meanwhile, expect the five-year study will amount to an expensive waste of time.

"Nothing good will come out of this," said Darryl Olsen, board representative of the Columbia-Snake River Irrigators Association.

Earlier this year, U.S. District Judge Michael Simon held



Sources: U.S. Army Corp. of Engineers

Alan Kenaga/Capital Press

that the federal government's plans for operating the facilities violated the Endangered Species Act so agencies must come up with new "reasonable and prudent alternatives" to protect fish in about two years.

Those plans must also be subjected to an "environmental impact statement," which environmental groups argued should be completed in three years.

Simon has instead sided with

the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and given the agencies more time, until 2021, to finish the EIS.

While there is an "urgent need" to correct problems with

the hydropower system, rushing the EIS process "to meet an arbitrary court deadline may be counterproductive," Simon ruled.

The EIS process is critical because the federal agencies will be required to examine several options for altering hydropower operations, such as removing four dams on the Snake River, said Todd True, an attorney for the Earthjustice law firm, which represents environmental groups.

Changes in the energy grid and river shipping will influence the government's analysis, as will improved information about climate change and dam removal, said True.

"There is a whole other context the government is going to be operating under this time," he said.

The Columbia-Snake River Irrigators Association isn't so enthusiastic.

The hydropower system has undergone EIS analysis several times in the past and it's unlikely that federal agencies will arrive at a different result this time,

said Olsen, CSRIA's board representative.

"It will be another big process and I really don't expect their conclusions to be much different," he said.

Irrigators fear that increased costs for operating the dams will drive up electricity rates, which would make pumping water more expensive.

Worries about the system's impact on fish also discourages state governments from issuing new water rights, according to irrigators.

The five years spent on the new EIS will likely cost \$20 million to \$30 million, Olsen said. "It's a consultant's dream."

Federal authorities probably won't remove the dams, so the ultimate outcome will likely be increased spending on environmental mitigation projects by the Bonneville Power Administration, which operates the system, he said.

"The real point is to extract more money out of Bonneville Power Administration," Olsen said. "There is no objective other than money."

NAWG polls wheat growers on farm bill needs

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press



Chandler Goule

The National Association of Wheat Growers is asking member farmers what they need from the next farm bill.

The results of the survey will help NAWG develop its priorities for the 2018 Farm Bill, which Congress will begin working on next year.

The survey asks, "which programs they're using, which programs they're not using, which ones they think might need to be tweaked," said Chandler Goule, NAWG CEO.

The survey will continue until nearly the end of the year.

Goule anticipates that crop insurance will remain a top priority. He hopes to hear from growers about their experienc-

es with the Price Loss Coverage and Agricultural Risk Coverage programs.

"Crop insurance is clearly going to have a big target on it because there's a significant amount of money there, but it's also the most important risk management tool for all the commodity programs," he said. "We will all have to band together to make sure we maintain that program in its current status and fully fund it so it can be effective across the country."

The Conservation Reserve Program has reduced acreage each year during the current Farm Bill. Goule says NAWG

will consider seeking more CRP acres and streamlining the Conservation Stewardship Program process.

He also expects more wheat farmers to participate in deliberations on the next farm bill.

"Unfortunately, producers are much more involved and hands-on when we are having difficult times in the agricultural sector," he said. "Right now, all commodities are low and a lot of our producers are struggling as they look for that capital and credit for next year, selling their products, especially wheat, at below the cost of production."

As of Aug. 30, hard red winter wheat ranged from \$4.42 to \$4.63 per bushel at Portland. Dark northern spring wheat ranged from \$5.41 to \$5.64 per bushel.

Armyworms invade grass seed fields

By MITCH LIES
For the Capital Press

The Oregon State University Extension Service has issued a pest alert regarding the presence of true (common) armyworms in Willamette Valley grass seed crops.

The service wrote that large numbers of the pest have been spotted in tall fescue and orchardgrass seed fields in the past two weeks in both the south and north Willamette Valley.

The pest, *Mythimna unipuncta*, also has been seen on sudan grass planted as a cover crop between nursery stock rows.

"Extensive damage may result if the population is not treated," the alert states. "Large numbers of larvae feed so voraciously that mass migrations of larvae can occur within a field and to adjacent fields very quickly."

Armyworm outbreaks occur suddenly, the alert states, and in large numbers. In the alert, extension personnel Amy Dreves, Nicole Anderson and Clare Sullivan compared the pest to the new winter cutworm, which erupted in grass seed fields last summer.

According to an extension publication issued in February, cutworm damage is less uniform than armyworm damage, but both pests move en masse, potentially inflicting widespread damage to new growth in late summer and early fall.

The armyworm, like the cutworm, also inflicts damage sporadically. The last time an

armyworm outbreak occurred in the Willamette Valley was 2004-2006, according to the alert. In that outbreak, the pest also was found in Southwest Oregon near Myrtle Point, and damaged grass pasture and corn in that area, according to Dreves.

In grass seed crops, the pest damages new growth by feeding on leaves and stems, leaving notched leaves and jagged leaf edges, according to the alert. Armyworms, like cutworms, can cause extension defoliation of plants over broad areas.

The alert advises growers to scout for the pest in and around crowns where birds are feeding and to dig around in the thatch of a plant and at its base. The pest feeds at night and curls into a C shape in the day in areas where it can avoid daylight.

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