

Water monitoring shutdown leaves river users puzzled



SALEM (AP) — A plan to abandon monitoring instruments that gauge water levels and flows on 92 Oregon rivers and streams has prompted a torrent of criticism from conservationists, boaters, anglers and residents.

"The idea stinks," said whitewater expert Ric Buhr, four-time president of the Santiam Whitewater Association and a commercial rafter.

He said everyone from commercial fishermen to casual recreational boaters and anglers use the river level reports to ensure a safe outing. Heading out with-

out such readings could endanger rafters, canoers and kayakers, he said.

"It doesn't make much sense to me," John Bielstein, president of the North Santiam River Guides Association, said of the plans to yank the stations Dec. 31. "A lot of rivers are unrunnable at certain stages. Anybody that spends time on the rivers really needs those things."

The state Department of Water Resources and the U.S. Geological Survey jointly operate the monitoring stations. State officials said they don't have enough money to keep the instruments functioning. However, federal officials said they would try to retain some of the key gauges.

Geraldine Walden worries about floods. She lives on the banks of the Siletz River, six miles southeast of Lincoln City. Two years ago, the floodwaters came up to the second step of her front porch.

And now she has learned the gauge measuring the river level near Siletz, about 20 miles upstream, is due to be shut down Dec. 31.

Walden depends on Jim Hawley, Lincoln County emergency services coordinator, to warn her when there's a dangerous rise in the river.

"We have a list of people we call when high water threatens so they can move

out or prepare," Hawley said. He said river levels have fluctuated wildly since the deteriorating Valtets Dam was removed two years ago, increasing the possibility of a serious flood.

"We need more of them, not fewer," Bill Bakke, executive director of Oregon Trout, said of the stations. "We hate to see this data base lost."

For more than a year, state officials, legislators, conservationists, utilities, irrigators and other users of the rivers have been discussing guaranteed river flows to ensure that there's enough water to flush juvenile fish downriver and to allow adult salmon back upriver to spawn.

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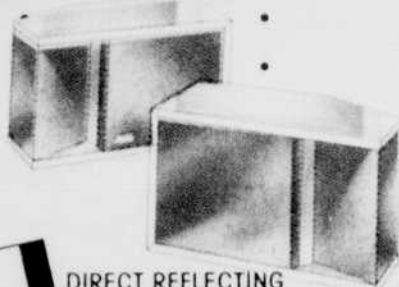
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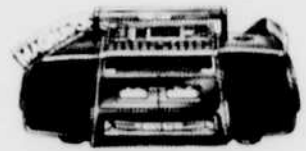
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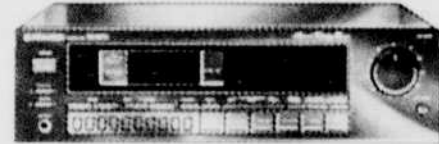


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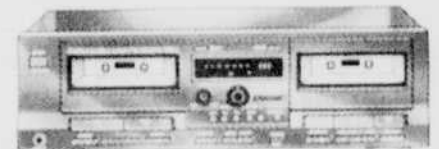


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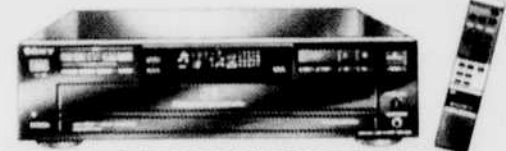


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