

DAMS

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to curtail carbon emissions and more.

“The Snake River dams produce over 1,000 average megawatts of reliable, clean, carbon-free hydroelectricity annually — enough to power nearly a million Northwest homes,” according to OTEC. “They also help mitigate the threat of floods to the Northwest and help drive the region’s economy by competitively transporting local crops and providing agriculture and local farmers with essential irrigation.”

Ted Case, director of Oregon Rural Electric Cooperative Association, also said he found Brown’s recent position on the dams a surprise.

“We’ve had no consultation. There was no discussion about us,” he said. “It’s confounding.”

He and representatives from other electric cooperatives are worried about what dam removal would bring for rural Oregonians.

“We’ll be short of power,” he said. “There’s a lot of concern as to how we’ll reach capacity. You could have blackouts in rural Oregon and electrical grid crashes.”

Replacing hydropower could be costly

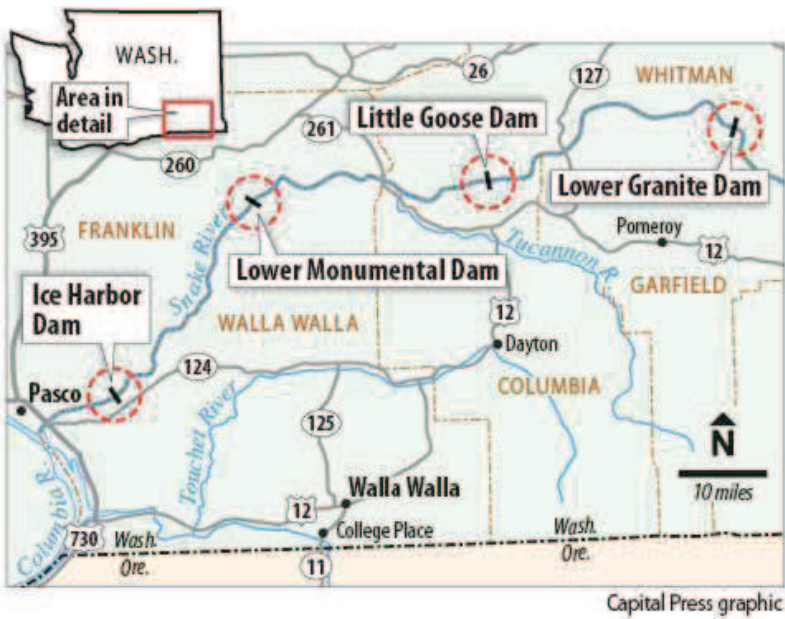
But a study in 2018 by Energy Strategies LLC for the Seattle-based Northwest Energy Coalition begs to differ.

The analysis quantified the power from the lower Snake River dams and assessed the fixed and variable costs of implementing renewable replacements, such as wind and solar, and what that would do to market prices.

The lower dams provide nearly 4% of the Pacific Northwest’s electricity, according to the report, and at less than a 1% increase in emissions, a new energy portfolio relying on renewables and increased energy-efficiency would add a bit more than \$1 a month

Dams on the chopping block?

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown’s advocacy for the removal of four dams on the lower Snake River has caused consternation and anger among a coalition of rural electrical co-ops and some Republican lawmakers.



to customer costs.

But Energy GPS LLC refuted that last month in a study for Northwest RiverPartners. It stated the lower Snake River dams generate up to 5.5% of the region’s electricity and replacing that power would cost \$860 million a year.

“The essence of it is this — the capabilities of these dams cannot be easily or inexpensively replaced. This would hurt those in Eastern Oregon who can least afford it,” Case stated in an email.

Case also said he doesn’t think the federal approval needed to remove the dams would come anytime soon.

“It would cost billions of dollars,” he said. “We’re going to do everything we can to prevent that, but I see no broad support for such action.”

Tribes prepare to weigh in

The Nez Perce, Yakama, Umatilla, Warm Springs and Shoshone Bannock tribes all relied on fishing from the river, which was once a main contributor and contained millions of salmon each year, well

before the construction of the dams.

Tribal salmon now are harvested per treaty rights at less than 1% of the levels they were before tribes made contact with white settlers, according to a 2014 report issued by the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission.

“Our diet still consists highly on salmon. It’s important we’re able to consume those foods,” said Chuck Sams, communications director for the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation. “We agree with a number of science reviews that there are issues around dams that could be resolved through fish passage and eventual dam removal.”

Sams said the Confederated Umatilla Tribes will release a policy statement in coming weeks as the fishing commission works on its own new analysis of the lower Snake River.

Letter just to start talks

For the Governor’s Office, the letter to Inslee is simply an initiation of discussion about the long-term

future. Brown’s press secretary, Kate Kondayen, in an email said the letter does not call for tearing out the dams “as has been characterized in initial coverage.”

“Instead, Oregon is asserting that we see value in analyzing a future without the dams in the long term, but focusing any definitive next steps on working together to identify a viable path forward to that future with interim steps such as flexible spill agreements,” she stated.

Still, Brown’s letter raised eyebrows for farmers and ports about what dam removal would mean for the transportation industry. The Pacific Northwest Waterways Association asserts the Columbia Snake River System is the nation’s largest wheat export gateway, transporting more than half of all U.S. wheat to overseas markets.

Brown’s letter comes a few weeks before a draft of the Columbia River Systems Operations Environmental Impact Statement is anticipated to be released in conjunction with the Corps, the Bureau of Reclamation and Bonneville Power in response to a federal ruling calling for a major overhaul of Columbia Snake River dam operations in 2016.

The Port of Umatilla has invested more than \$100,000 in litigation regarding dam removal, and is home to one of Oregon’s largest wheat terminals along the Columbia-Snake River System. United Grain Corps operates the terminal and traffics hundreds of millions of bushels of wheat along the Snake River every year, including yields from Umatilla and Morrow counties.

“As a grain company we depend on the river system heavily,” said Pacific Northwest United Grain manager Jason Middleton. “Farmers enjoy a low basis number. (Removal) would have an immense impact.”

According to the Waterways Association, transportation via barge is the most fuel efficient. A

single barge on a river can carry as much cargo as 134 trucks can.

“Removal would put many more trucks on the freeways and the highways. Infrastructure costs would go through the roof,” Middleton said.

Talks could lead to efficiencies

But David Moryc, a senior director for American Rivers, said continued discussion could lead to cost-effective solutions, possibly through the formation of a short-line railroad cooperative along the Snake River.

He also asked how the billions of dollars being poured into salmon restoration along the river could be reinvested were dam removal to boost populations back to historical levels.

“You’re talking about really high valued habitat where currently the salmon and steel stocks are having trouble because they have to pass through eight dams,” he said.

American Rivers has helped negotiate river restoration projects and private dam removals around the Pacific Northwest. Moryc said some utility entities have decided salmon restoration efforts and maintenance costs outweigh the price-tag from options outside hydropower.

“You’ve got a number of examples of significant dam removal projects in history. We’re seeing positive responses for salmon returns,” he said.

He also doesn’t know how long it could take for dam removal to come to a head at a federal level, and added the environmental impact statement coming later this month likely won’t advocate for dam removal. Still, Moryc said he sees a spark in Brown’s recent letter.

“My hope is that there are some seeds here,” he said, “some kernels of hope in the dialogue.”

— Observer staff contributed to this feature.

EXITS

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Senate side of the Capitol building late Monday morning, before the floor session was called.

Staff at Sen. Bill Hansell, R-Athena’s office said he was “not available at this time.”

Sen. Brian Boquist, R-Dallas, has been excused for the next couple of days due to a family medical issue.

Workers in the office of Sen. Lynn Findley, R-Vale, said Findley was “not here” and that “he’s not coming back.”

In a statement shortly before the floor session, Findley said that “if my colleagues will not allow for a fair process

in the building, then I will represent my constituents from outside the building.”

Staff for Sen. Denyc Boles, R-Salem, referred questions to communications. Kate Gillem, Senate Republican spokesperson, said all walked out except for a “senator from Bend.”

Gillem said they would stay away for the rest of the session. She said they could maybe be drawn back if the bill could be referred to voters.

She didn’t say where they went.

“I don’t know,” she said. “They’ve been super tight-lipped. Even with staff.”

— EO reporters Antonio Sierra and Jessica Pollard and The Associated Press contributed to this report.

CULTURE

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rian jollof rice and French crepes. Students spent the days before the event preparing food that would feed more than 100 people.

“There are special days where we would make and eat crepes,” Charlene Bikai, a French exchange student, said. “It made the most sense to make them.”

The dinner and show used to take place in two locations, which presented logistical problems, according to Morton. To alleviate these issues, the dinner and the performances now happen together in a room at the Gilbert Event Center. Guests sampled the food from around the world and groups performed for their enjoyment.

Kawa Taiko, a professional Japanese drumming group from Ontario, opened the show, and later in the evening Govind Brar, an exchange student from India, performed a folk dance routine.

“The dance was created in the 14th century,” Brar said. “It is traditionally done at celebrations, so this



French exchange student Charlene Bikai prepares crepes Saturday for the International Student Association Dinner and Show at Eastern Oregon University, La Grande. Nearly 20 exchange students prepared dishes representing their cultures and countries to share at the event.

is a great occasion.”

Brar is the president of the International Student Association and introduced each performing group. He said the annual dinner and show are great ways to bring the rest of the world to people who may not be able to travel. Morton and Brar agreed the event presents a

learning opportunity for students and those who attend the event.

“The cultural exchange is a two-way street,” Morton said. “These international students are getting to experience American culture and way of life, while sharing their own culture and experiences.”

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