

## Drought

## Drought reduces hydroelectric output

By ZANE SPARLING  
Capital Press

A drought doesn't just mean less water. It also means less power.

On the Columbia and Snake rivers, where infrequent rains and an almost nonexistent snowpack have led to parched waterways and dangerous fire conditions, the amount of hydroelectric energy generated by government dams has dropped by almost one-third.

Last May, 23 dams on the Columbia and its major tributaries produced 8.59 million megawatts of power, according to data from the U.S. Army Corps of

Engineers.

This year, during the same time-frame, the dams generated just 5.78 million megawatts.

"Water is our fuel on the hydro system, and there's just less of it," Bonneville Power Administration spokesman Joel Scruggs said. "We're prepared to handle the dry year and we're hopeful that we'll see more water. Otherwise we'll manage accordingly."

The BPA, a federal agency in charge marketing electricity produced by the dams, provides almost 35 percent of the power in the region.

The system's portfolio includes ma-

major producers such as the Dalles Dam on the Columbia, where the water flow has dropped to roughly 145,000 cubic feet per second, from 235,000 cubic feet this time last year.

That's primarily due to the lack of snowfall, according to Bill Proctor, chief of hydrologic engineering and power for the northwestern division of the Corps.

It's not the snow you see on peaks — that sort of glacial ice is around all year. Instead, Proctor said, rivers are fed by runoff, usually rain or melted snow. And while precipitation fed the Pacific Northwest river system in the spring, the lack of snowfall at lower elevations

has created the second worst runoff situation here in the last 55 years.

On the Snake, one of Columbia's major tributaries, streamflow has dropped to an estimated 25,000 cubic feet per second, compared to a normal flow of 54,000. It's expected to stay that way through the end of the summer.

Both the Corps and the BPA say the drop in power production won't lead to an immediate rate increase for consumers and businesses.

"The BPA doesn't change rates every day," Proctor said. "Their purchase price doesn't affect your price today. But the rates you're paying now will af-

fect the rates in the future... when (the BPA) recalculates rates."

Karl Kanbergs, team leader for the reservoir control center, agreed.

"When resources are scarce, the price goes up. That's true for anything."

Scruggs, the BPA spokesperson, said the agency sets rates every two years. He said a prolonged, multiyear drought is a possibility, not a certainty.

"I don't think we want to play with hypotheticals. We're concerned with managing the system right now," he said. "When you're dependent on the weather, there's always a lot of uncertainty."

## Hydropower challenge could impact irrigators

## Oral arguments held in legal battle over 14 Northwest dams

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI  
Capital Press

The federal government's operation of Northwest hydropower dams is again under attack for allegedly jeopardizing fish, potentially impacting irrigators who rely on the Columbia and Snake rivers.

The most recent "reasonable and prudent alternatives" aimed at mitigating risk to threatened and endangered fish, issued by the National Marine Fisheries Service last year, were challenged as unlawful during a recent court hearing.

Critics of the agency's plans claim that it's overly confident about the positive effects of restoring tributaries while downplaying the hazards of hydropower facilities in the main river channels.

"We're always looking to the future for benefits that haven't yet materialized," said Stephanie Parent, an attorney representing the State of Oregon, during oral arguments in Portland on June 23.

The plaintiffs also faulted the federal government for being ambiguous in its goals and time frames for increasing salmon and steelhead populations, which they claim are killed at unsustainable levels as they pass through 14 hydroelectric dams.

These species are still at risk of getting wiped out by a catastrophe even if their numbers have improved due to natural conditions in recent years, according to the plaintiffs, which include tribes and environmentalists.

"A growing species is not the same thing as a recovered species," said Todd True, attorney for the Earthjustice law firm.

If the case results in further revisions to the hydropower system's operations, it could affect irrigators on multiple fronts, said Darryl Olsen, board representative of the Columbia-Snake River Irrigators Association, which has been involved in the litigation.

Environmental groups want to reduce water levels in storage reservoirs, arguing this will improve flow rates and thus enhance fish survival, he said.

The federal government has rejected this claim, finding that the main factor in fish survival is temperature, which isn't

affected by lowering reservoir levels, Olsen said.

"Much of our water management has nothing to do with empirical reality," he said.

Water rights may also be affected by the litigation.

The flow rates in the Columbia and Snake rivers already preclude any new water rights from being assigned, but an eventual ruling could require even greater pressure to leave water in-stream, Olsen said.

Also, any mandate that NMFS revise its plans for the hydropower will also be extremely expensive and effectively raise the costs of electricity for pumping, he said.

The recent court battle is part of an ongoing legal campaign against the hydropower system's management that stretches back to 2001.

A potentially important difference is that the litigation is now overseen by a new federal judge, Michael Simon.

U.S. District Judge James Redden, who previously presided over the case, repeatedly found the federal government's operation plans to be inadequate and remanded them for changes.

After recusing himself from the lawsuit, Redden said he believed the government should require the removal of four hydroelectric dams on the Snake river to improve fish passage.

Another contentious point is how much water should be spilled over dams to prevent fish from passing through turbines, with the plaintiffs pressing for increased spills.

During the recent oral arguments, plaintiffs alleged that NMFS set a lenient standard for overcoming the "jeopardy" that hydropower operations impose on fish.

The agency was also faulted for failing to explain how it arrived at certain conclusions about fish survival.

"It's impossible to follow the train of reasoning," said True.

The federal government argues that its "jeopardy" analysis complies with the Endangered Species Act, which gives agencies with discretion in determining a species' chances of survival and recovery.

It also rejected claims that the "reasonable and prudent alternatives" were lacking, arguing that the plaintiffs cannot overrule the agency simply because they favor a different policy.

"The best available science shows that removing tributary habitat constraints through restoration actions is reasonably certain to increase fish abundance and productivity," NMFS said in a court document.

## Drought conditions take hold in W. Washington

## One-third of state in 'severe drought,' including Olympic Peninsula

By DON JENKINS  
Capital Press

The drought worsened Thursday in Washington, with 18 eastern counties declared federal disaster areas and the drought officially becoming more widespread and severe on the westside.

The U.S. Drought Monitor reported for the first time that drought conditions prevail throughout Western Washington, with the Olympic Peninsula in a severe drought.

Hot and dry weather — combined with the complete absence of melting snow — drove the percentage of the state in a moderate or severe drought from 63 percent to 90 percent over the previous week.

The percentage in a severe drought increased from 25 percent to 32 percent, according to the Drought Monitor, a partnership between the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Drought conditions spread and grew more severe primarily west of the Cascades. A large swath along the Interstate 5 corridor from Oregon to Canada was categorized for the first time as being in a moderate drought.

Meanwhile, the drought status of all or parts of four westside counties — Clallam, Jefferson, Grays Harbor and Mason — were revised from moderate to severe.

As a result, more counties



Don Jenkins/Capital Press

A sprinkler waters a field in Lewis County in southwest Washington June 25. Almost all of Western Washington is now in a drought and several counties are in a severe drought, according to the U.S. Drought Monitor.



Don Jenkins/Capital Press

Hay bales sit in a field in Lewis County in southwest Washington June 25. Almost all of Western Washington is in a drought and several counties are in severe drought, according to the U.S. Drought Monitor.

are on track to become federal disaster areas.

The USDA on Wednesday declared a federal drought disaster in 18 Washington counties, the first such designations in the state.

"Our hearts go out to those Washington farmers and ranchers affected by recent natural disasters," Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said in a written statement.

Eight south-central and southeast counties — Adams, Benton, Columbia, Franklin, Grant, Klickitat, Walla Walla and Yakima — drove the declaration. They had been in a severe drought for eight weeks, the threshold for disaster designation.

Because the drought has coincided with the grazing season, ranchers in those counties are eligible for pay-

## Ecology to cut off irrigators in Western and Eastern Washington

## August comes early for rivers and streams

By DON JENKINS  
Capital Press

A sharp, sudden and unexpected drop in rivers and tributaries are causing unprecedented state-ordered shutoffs in June and July to hundreds of irrigators in Western and Eastern Washington.

The Washington Department of Ecology says it has a legal obligation to cut off farmers with junior water rights to preserve minimum flows for fish and irrigators with senior rights.

Some of the irrigators have lost their water before, but not until late in the growing sea-

son. Rivers have fallen to levels typical of August or September, ecology officials say.

"It's just been a real dramatic drop in the last week," DOE spokeswoman Joye Redfield-Wilder said. "It's just so widespread and indicative of a new day out there."

Beginning Monday, about 260 irrigators on the Methow, Colville and Little Spokane rivers will have their water shut off. They can call a DOE phone number daily to check whether the restriction has been lifted, but the answer will be no for the rest of the summer unless there's enough rain to cause river levels to spike, Redfield-Wilder said.

Another 80 irrigators in the Okanogan and Similkameen watersheds in north-central

Washington were cut off June 23, while more than 40 irrigators on the Wenatchee River lost water June 15.

In Western Washington, DOE plans to deliver shutoff notices by mid-July to about 70 irrigators in the Chehalis River Basin, an agricultural area in Southwest Washington. Those irrigators were last shut off in 2006, but not until September.

Officials in the spring said Washington was experiencing a "snowpack drought." Record-breaking heat and an almost complete absence of rain this month have made that description incomplete.

South-central Washington farmer Neal Brown said Friday that a week ago he still hoped his spring wheat would yield an aver-

aged-sized crop. Amid a triple-digit heat wave and month-long dry spell in Klickitat County, he's slashed his expectations in half.

"It's really quite remarkable," he said. "It's degrading rapidly."

The Chehalis River relies on rain, not snow. DOE's water resource manager for Southwest Washington, Mike Gallagher, said that two weeks ago he wouldn't have predicted the basin's irrigators would be shut off.

"There's been a remarkable drop in the last two or three weeks," he said. "This is uncharted territory for all of us."

Gallagher said water could be restored if there's enough rain. But he said the chances aren't good for relief this summer. "We need a wet and snowy winter," he said.

So far, only the Chehalis Basin has been targeted for shut off notices on the westside. But other Western Washington rivers are being monitored. "All across Western Washington, we're seeing flows typical of August and September, not June," DOE spokesman Chase Gallagher said.

## LEGAL

## PORT OF GRANDVIEW REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

The Port of Grandview invites proposals from persons or businesses interested in starting a business in the Ports Business Incubator Building located at 683 Wallace Way, Grandview, WA. The purpose of this RFP is to determine interest in locating and starting new businesses in the building. The type of business proposals selected will determine the interior construction required, rental rates and occupancy dates.

All proposals shall include:

- The type of business (manufacturing, wholesale or retail)
- The area required (sq. footage)
- Volumes of water and sewer necessary.
- Natural gas and power requirements
- Product(s) to be manufactured or created
- Specific building requirements
- Anticipated number of employees
- Names and contact information of principals
- Personal or business references.

Persons interested in viewing the building or having questions should contact: Jessica Hansen, Executive Director, Port of Grandview, 509-882-9975 or jessica@portofgrandview.org. Proposals in sealed envelopes marked "Incubator Proposal" should be postmarked not later than Tuesday, July 28, 2015 and addressed to: Port of Grandview, PO Box 392, Grandview, WA 98930 Legal-25-4-2#4

## LEGAL

## SECRETARY OF STATE NOTICE OF PROPOSED RULEMAKING

Oregon Department of Agriculture, Plant Program, Administrative Rules Chapter #603, Sue Gooch, Rules Coordinator, (503) 986-4583.

Amend: OAR 603-052-1300

**RULE SUMMARY:** Adds several species to the list of approved terrestrial invertebrates and removes the Monarch butterfly from that list. Last day for public comment is July 22, 2015.

27-2#4

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