

Removal of Dillon Dam could happen next summer

By **GEORGE PAVEN**
EO Media Group

ECHO, Ore. — A headache for farmers and fish on the lower Umatilla River for decades, the Dillon Dam is finally near its end.

The Umatilla Basin Watershed Council and Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation plan to remove the troublesome diversion dam near Echo by next summer. Not only has the concrete structure long blocked passage for native salmon, steelhead and lamprey, it has been a maintenance nightmare as gravel bars routinely wash over the irrigation headgate.

But before the dam can come out, water rights for the local Dillon Irrigation Co. need to be rerouted from another source.

The watershed council came up with a design in 2014 that taps into the neighboring Westland Irrigation Canal, running 11,000 feet of pipe down Andrews Road and back into the Dillon Irrigation Ditch — completely bypassing the dam.



A large gravel bar washed over nearly half of the Dillon Diversion Dam on the Umatilla River outside Echo, Ore., in March 2014. The dam could be removed as early as next year.

Funding for the project appears to be in place after the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's Restoration and Enhancement Board approved a \$175,500 grant in May. The Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission still needs to approve the grant at its Aug. 5 meeting in Salem,

but Jon Staldine, executive director for the watershed council, said their proposal has been well-received.

"They saw it was really a collaborative project," Staldine said.

The watershed council had already received \$350,000 from the Oregon Watershed

Enhancement Board and \$20,000 from the CTUIR to build the pipeline. Staldine said the grant from ODFW will allow them to start construction in November or December, wrapping up by February so farmers can get back to work.

"The pipeline is the key project," he said. "If that doesn't happen, the dam won't be removed."

Dillon Dam is operated by the Dillon Irrigation Co., which was established in 1897. The company is currently made up of three landowners with approximately 1,400 total acres. Mike Taylor owns the Double M Ranch, the largest of the three, and serves as president of the irrigation company.

Taylor has been talking about getting rid of the Dillon Dam for 15 years before the watershed council took the reins. He said the Dillon Irrigation Co. collects \$10 per acre from landowners, most of which goes toward paying for maintenance at the dam.

Whenever high flows

sweep down the river, gravel and debris plug the headgate and fish ladders at the dam. It's up to the producers to come in and clean up the mess. Taylor said they're looking forward to having a more reliable water delivery system from the Westland Canal.

"Getting the dam out of the river is a good thing," Taylor said. "We've been working on it for a while."

Once the pipeline is complete, the watershed council and tribes can turn their attention to removing the dam from the river.

Staldine said they are working together on a design and applying for permits, which could take four to six months to be approved.

If all goes smoothly, in-stream construction will take place sometime between July 15 and Sept. 30 of next year. Staldine said they haven't yet worked out the cost, but said it will be paid for out of the tribes' Fish Accords with the Bonneville Power Administration.

Dillon Dam was originally built in 1915 and replaced

sometime in the mid-1970s. It does have fish and lamprey ladders, though Staldine said they're not up to current standards. Bill Duke, fish biologist with ODFW in Pendleton, said the dam has been a complete barrier to lamprey in past years, and a partial barrier to salmon.

"In some years, it's a significant portion of the fall chinook run that gets delayed down there," Duke said.

Staldine said the problem affects juveniles as well as adult fish stuck below the dam. The likelihood of survival for juveniles reared below the dam are virtually non-existent due to high water temperatures in the summertime, he said.

Yanking the dam will allow more fish, including fall and spring chinook runs, to make it to their traditional spawning grounds farther up the Umatilla River, boosting survival and providing more fishing opportunities.

"We won't have fish caught below that are essentially getting fried every year," Staldine said.

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FOR SOME TEENS, 4-H IS 'LIKE HOME'



Happy Valley, Calif., 4-H members, from left, Matthew Bybee, Bethany Chambers, Maddie Coburn and Cody Williams stand behind the swine barn at the Shasta District Fair in Anderson, Calif., in June. The youngsters all decided to stay in 4-H during their high school years rather than moving to FFA.



4-H member Cody Williams of Happy Valley, Calif., tends to his hog at the Shasta District Fair in Anderson, Calif., in June. He and several of his classmates decided to stay in 4-H while in high school.



4-H member Maddie Coburn of Happy Valley, Calif., checks one of her pigs at the Shasta District Fair in Anderson, Calif., in June. She and several of her classmates chose to stay in 4-H while in high school.

ANDERSON, Calif. — Maddie Coburn, 18, has been raising animals and bringing them to her local fair for years. But while many students move to FFA when they become teen-agers, Coburn stayed in 4-H. The charter school she was attending didn't have its own FFA program, as many public high schools do. "4-H provides for any age," Coburn, a Happy Valley, Calif., resident, said while tending to her pigs at the Shasta District Fair in June.

Coburn is one of several students in Happy Valley 4-H who remained into their high school years. While FFA is incorporated into high school curricula and offers access to scholarships and other incentives, some youngsters prefer to stay in 4-H for various reasons.

Cody Williams, 17, is studying for a U.S. Coast Guard leadership program and wants experience "helping out the kids" in his 4-H group, he said. Bethany Chambers, 14, tried FFA but found she was more comfortable with her friends in 4-H, with whom she'd become close. "I've been in it for a long time," Chambers said. "This is practically my home."

Matthew Bybee, 16, felt the same way. "I'd rather just stay here and finish out my years until I go to college," he said.

Having students stay in 4-H while in high school is "not very common," said Nadine Bailey, a Happy Valley 4-H adviser. For one thing, FFA membership provides students with access to scholarships that are more difficult — but not impossible — to obtain in 4-H, she said. However, Bailey and other adult leaders don't consider 4-H to be in competition with FFA, and they encourage students to do whichever they choose.

For the older students, all of them said helping the younger ones with their projects or with advice is one of the most enjoyable aspects of staying. "It's like generation to generation," Bybee said.

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