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# $1 BILLION QUESTION

## Oregon wants to reintroduce threatened fish upstream of the Hells Canyon dams, but Idaho officials and irrigators don't want to be stuck with the bill

By JOHN O'CONNELL
Capital Press

HELLS CANYON — Idaho farmers who rely on Snake River water for irrigation fear they could one day be stuck with a $1 billion-plus bill for a plan by the State of Oregon to help endangered fish.

As a condition of relicensing Idaho Power Co.'s three Hells Canyon dams on the Idaho-Oregon border, Oregon leaders have proposed reintroducing endangered steelhead trout and salmon into Pine Creek, which originates in Oregon and spills into the Snake River upstream of Hells Canyon Dam. Under Oregon's draft Clean Water Act certification proposal, Idaho Power would be expected to trap the fish upstream of the dam and truck them for release downstream, enabling them to migrate to the Pacific Ocean.

Courtesy of Idaho Power

Water flows from Hells Canyon Dam on March 27. Idaho Power is seeking a new federal license for its three dams in the Hells Canyon complex on the Idaho-Oregon border, but the utility is caught in the middle of a fight between the states over Oregon's plan to reintroduce endangered steelhead and salmon upstream of Hells Canyon.

Marilyn Fonseca, hydropower program coordinator for the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, said her state has developed a phased-in fish reintroduction plan spanning two decades and would expand into other tributaries based on the experience at Pine Creek. Fonseca said Oregon considers fish passage to be an integral part of meeting the state's own U.S. Environmental Protection Agency-approved water-quality standards.

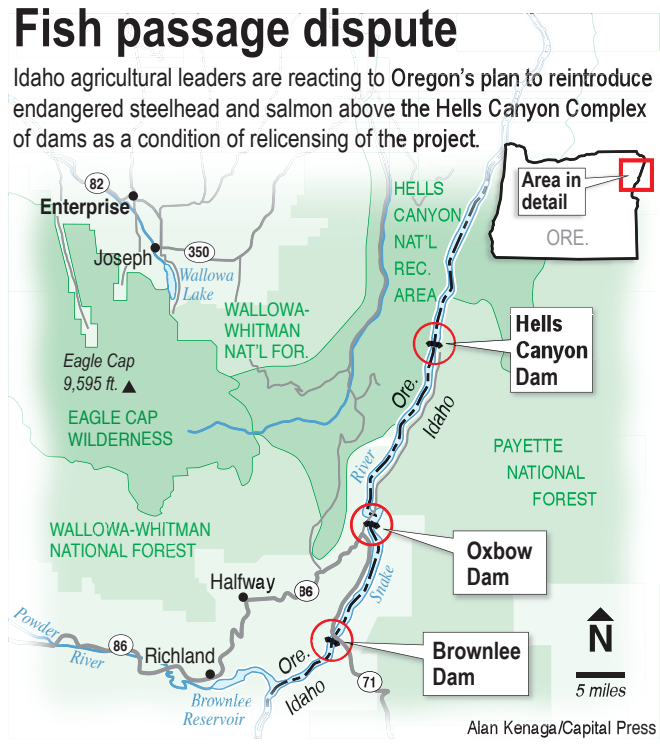
Should Oregon eventually reintroduce steelhead and salmon in tributaries upstream of the nearby Brownlee Dam, endangered fish would have access to a broad reach of the Snake River through Idaho, forcing the state to manage the system for the new endangered species. That would raise the bar on water-quality standards and place additional demands on the river's fully allocated storage and natural-flow water rights. Snake River water users upstream predict they'd face a cascade of new expenses and regulations.

"It's not a reach to say this could potentially impact every use of water in Southern and Eastern Idaho," said Norm Semanko, the outgoing executive director of the Idaho Water Users Association.

*Turn to FISH, Page 14*

### Fish passage dispute

Idaho agricultural leaders are reacting to Oregon's plan to reintroduce endangered steelhead and salmon above the Hells Canyon Complex of dams as a condition of relicensing of the project.




Alan Kenaga/Capital Press

Courtesy of Idaho Power

Idaho Power works on its Bayha Island project last October, testing the concept of narrowing and deepening a 30-mile stretch of the Snake River to accelerate flows and cool water as part of its mitigation package for relicensing the Hells Canyon dams.

# Federal water boost comes late in the season for valley growers

By TIM HEARDEN
Capital Press

SACRAMENTO — San Joaquin Valley growers certainly aren't complaining after their Central Valley Project water allocation was boosted to 100 percent of requested supplies for the first time since 2006.

But such a bonanza after years of little or no surface water would have been more helpful if it were announced two months ago, industry and university officials said.

Growers of annual crops are long past the point when they had to make planting decisions based on the water they expected to receive, said Ryan Jacobsen, chief executive officer of the Fresno County Farm Bureau.

"It's great news that's come two months too late," Jacobsen said. "As far as immediate economic activity, additional planting is not likely to happen ... It allows obviously for additional water for those permanent plantings and the current annual crops that are in the ground.

"At this point, the most we can hope for is some additional planting in the fall and winter and ... carrying that water over until next year," he said.

However, if a farmer decides not to use some of his or her allocation in an attempt to carry it over until next season, it could be a roll of the dice.

Carryover supplies in the San Luis Reservoir from last year enabled the Bureau of Reclamation to issue the 100 percent allocation, agency spokesman Louis Moore said.

If districts have leftover water after this season, their ability to draw on it next year would be "a negotiated action" between them and Reclamation, Moore said. What the bureau would really like is for growers to use surface water this year and leave their wells alone as much as possible so that the aquifers can be recharged.

"Our goal is to provide as much water as possible," he said.

Ironically, growers might have a better chance of accessing leftover water if next year is dry than if it is wet. That's because the San Luis Reservoir is already full and more runoff is coming, so there might be nowhere to physically put water if it starts raining early next winter, said Bob Hutmacher, director of the University of California's West Side Research and Extension Center.

For instance, the Westlands Water District will allow customers to do carryover water "to a degree," said Hutmacher, who is based in Five Points, Calif.

*Turn to WATER, Page 14*

# Report: Oregon's wolf population growth 'weak' in 2016

Courtesy Baker Aircraft; ODFW

After radio-collaring a subadult female of the Chesnimnus pack, an ODFW biologist double-checks the fit of the GPS radio-collar. The wolf was captured Feb. 23 in northern Wallowa County.

By ERIC MORTENSON
Capital Press

**"It's not the actual population, but the actual minimum. You know there can't be fewer."**

**Russ Morgan,** ODFW's wolf program manager

SALEM — Oregon had only two more confirmed wolves at the end of 2016 than it did the year before, a growth rate the state wildlife department described as "weak" and a sharp drop from the 27 to 36 percent growth rates the previous three years.

The state visually documented 112 wolves at the end of 2016, according to ODFW's annual report. At the end of 2015, Oregon had 110 confirmed wolves.

Department spokeswoman Michelle Dennehy acknowledged the low population gain but said ODFW is not concerned.

"It's one year, one data point, based on what we saw," she said. "It's not a trend of growth rates decreasing."

Russ Morgan, ODFW's wolf program manager, said the weak population gain is a "byproduct of our counting methodology," in which wolves aren't counted without a confirmed sighting. He called that method "very conservative."

"You get what you get," he said. "It's not the actual population, but the actual minimum. You know there can't be fewer."

In the future, the department may rely more on pack counts than on breeding pair counts, he said, and include population estimates based on known birth rates and other information.

Oregon Wild, a conservation group long involved in wolf management issues, holds an opposite view.

In a prepared statement, Conservation Director Steve Pedery noted the report shows population growth is "stalled" and the number of breeding pairs and packs declined from 2015.

*Turn to WOLF, Page 14*

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