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Opinion

Editorial Board

Publisher
John Perry

Editor
Joe Beach

Managing Editor
Carl Sampson

opinions@capitalpress.com

Online: www.capitalpress.com/opinion

OUR VIEW

Oregon's \$1 billion fish plan shouldn't cost Idaho

The state of Oregon has a plan that could cost Idaho farmers, electricity rate payers and others a bundle of money.

The plan — to reintroduce salmon and steelhead in Pine Creek, a tributary of the Snake River — is part of Oregon's draft Clean Water Act proposal. The plan spans 20 years and, depending on how it works out, could expand to include adding fish to other tributaries.

The plan is Oregon's contribution to Idaho Power's efforts to renew the federal license for its three dams on the Snake River, which runs along the Oregon-Idaho border in Hells Canyon.

Idaho farmers and other ratepayers say they have a billion

reasons to question the plan.

If fish are reintroduced upstream from the dams, Idaho Power would have to provide them with transportation up- and downstream, around the dams as they migrate to and from the Pacific Ocean. In addition, Idaho water users such as irrigators would have to adjust the river's water quality and temperature to sustain the fish. That's being done, but not on Oregon's schedule.

The estimated pricetag: \$1 billion, give or take a few hundred million, that would be paid by Idaho water users, electricity rate payers and others.

It's hard to express how cockeyed the Oregon plan is. That Oregon's leaders want more fish is OK. Fish are apparently the top priority of every Oregon official,

from the governor down. More than a decade ago, former Gov. John Kitzhaber said Oregon had spent more than \$1 billion on fish. Who knows what the total is now.

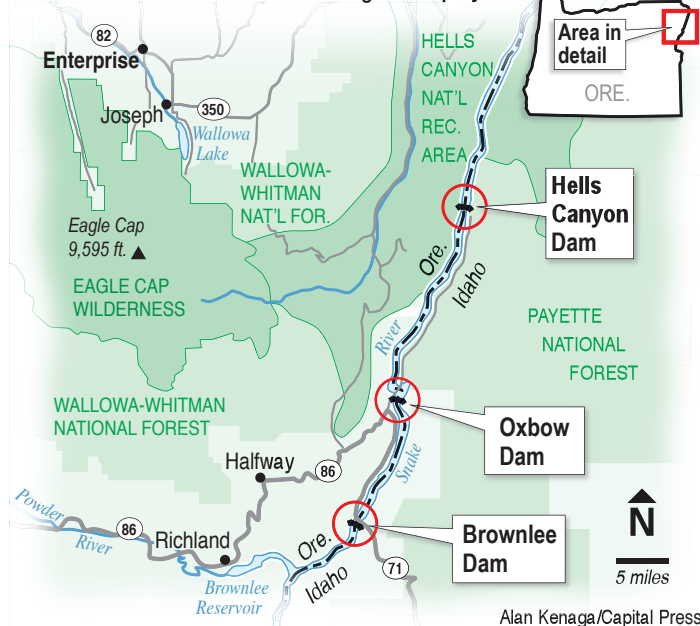
According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, in 2014, the most recent year for which figures are available, Oregon, Idaho and Washington and federal government spent \$357 million on endangered Columbia and Snake River salmon and steelhead.

By our lights, that's more than enough. We look at that sum and wonder what else could be accomplished that would benefit people instead of fish.

We can't explain Oregon leaders' obsession with fish, but we do know that whatever they plan to do, the cost shouldn't fall to the people of Idaho.

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

OUR VIEW



Wolf plan hearing should be in northeastern Oregon

The Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission has scheduled two public hearings on an updated wolf management plan.

Many ranchers in wolf country would counter that state wildlife officials have in reality updated their plan to manage cattle producers. And it seems they're doing it a bit far from where wolves and people most often interact.

Oregon's wolf population has grown steadily in the decade since the first wolves migrated from Idaho into Northeast Oregon. In 2011 there were only 23. 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.

ODFW officials have described Oregon's wolf population growth as a biological success story, and the state commission took wolves off the state endangered species list in 2015.

They remain protected under the federal Endangered Species Act in areas west of U.S.

highways 395, 78 and 95. That's most of the state.

We have generally agreed that wolves have a place in Oregon's wild country. Oregon is a big place, with room for native wildlife and domestic livestock.

But we've been equally adamant that ranchers should have reasonable leeway to take action against wolves when non-lethal actions aimed at keeping them away from livestock don't work. That's not the case in the current plan, and less so in the proposed update.

Instead, ODFW has proposed raising the bar.

The commission plans hearings on the updated plan at its next two regularly scheduled meetings. The first is April 21 in Klamath Falls, an area of the state that only recently started to report some wolf activity. The second will be May 19 in Portland, where there have been no wolves for decades.

The commission has received quite a few letters from Portlanders who write passionately about their desire

that wolves go completely unmolested in the state. They argue that the wolves, as property of the state, belong just as much to them as Eastern Oregon ranchers.

That's true. But while the Willamette River belongs to all Oregonians, discussions on its restoration are never held in Enterprise.

It seems to us that commissioners would want to make it easier to hear from people for whom wolves are not an abstract attraction. We can assure them that there is no lack of diversity of opinion on wolves, even in the far reaches of Wallowa County, where livestock depredation is common.

Paraphrasing a member of Oregon's wolf management team, the ultimate success of wolves in Oregon requires their widespread acceptance in those areas where they most come in contact with human activity. For now, that's ranching country.

That's where the wolves will be managed. Perhaps that's where the plan should get a hearing.

With fewer farm laborers, is Mechanization Era dawning?

By JOE GUZZARDI
For the Capital Press

Guest
comment
Joe Guzzardi



For decades, the U.S. agriculture industry has lobbied hard for more non-immigrant guestworker visas to help harvest its crops. Ag leaders and their congressional representatives argue, with some truth, that no matter the wage, Americans won't do field work.

But for just as many years, immigration reduction proponents counter that the solution isn't importing poverty in the form of more cheap labor visas, but to mechanize ag operations, done effectively worldwide.

The moment of truth is at hand, and the world's breadbasket, California, is struggling to find its way in the new reality. Because President Donald Trump promised to enforce immigration laws, some of last year's farmworkers may have been removed. And illegal Southwest border crossings that might have included future ag workers have dropped 60 percent since President Trump's inauguration.

More H-2A ag visas, growers' default remedy to the perceived labor shortage, is a temporary but flawed fix.

However, high immigration, both through the legal H-2A visa or illegal entry, discourages mechanization, the long-term solution, and diminishes productivity. A recent Los Angeles Times story highlighted the growers' dilemma and underscored the fact that the most efficient resolution to labor shortages is mechanization.

For most growers, the Mechanization Era is at hand. A San Joaquin Valley grape grower told Times reporters that when he couldn't afford to raise his pay scale, he spent \$50,000 on equipment, which allowed him to cut his crew, and saved him \$80 an acre culling his crop.

Mechanization also has been a boon to other crop growers. When Arizona passed laws that penalized employers who

hired illegal immigrants, a jalapeño pepper grower invested \$2 million in a stem-removing machine. With the money he saved, he hired skilled laborers at higher wages, and improved his productivity.

A Georgia onion grower bought a harvester and cut his workforce from 100 to 10, and a Vermont dairy now uses robots to milk its cows. The robots weigh the cows, take their temperatures and check their milk for infections. The dairy owner said that his robots beat the humans "all the way around," including eliminating the possibility of a midnight call from immigration authorities advising that his workforce won't be showing up the next day.

Despite mechanization's efficiency, many in Congress and the Chamber of Commerce are unwilling to let go of the H-2A visa that often prevents Americans without a high school degree from getting a job. Last year, about 5,000 H-2A visas were unused during FY 2015, and a group of 32 U.S. senators want them added to the current 66,000 annual cap.

But with President Trump in the White House at least until 2020, the endless cheap labor supply may completely dry up. Growers would be better advised to consider cost- and time-saving mechanization rather than lobbying Congress to artificially manipulate the H-2A visa cap. For its part, Congress should use its influence to encourage growers to enter the 21st century.

Joe Guzzardi is a senior writing fellow with Californians for Population Stabilization, a nonprofit focused on stabilizing the population to preserve the environment and ensure a good quality of life for all. Contact him at joeguzzardi@capsweb.org and follow him on Twitter @joeguzzardi19.

Readers' views

Renewable Fuels Standard is good for Oregon

Whether it's for cattle or crops, farmers and ranchers have been on the forefront of conservation.

Many frontline harvesters of the land and sea are also leading efforts to find new ways to cultivate and care for soil and water, fisheries and farmland. Partnerships, like the Renewable Fuels Standard, between the agriculture community and the alternative en-

ergy industry show the valuable opportunities that can arise when we all come together.

Confronting our environmental problems requires us to remember that our states, our communities, and our professions — our people — are more complicated that we

often think. But changes like this don't come easy. Congress must stay consistent so that our industry can do what we do best. I encourage Congressman Walden to maintain the RFS as it is and give Oregon's agricultural community and economy the certainty to grow.

As a rancher, we want to leave the land, air and water a little better for our children. Long-term stability in biofuel production and the Renewable Fuels Standard is good for Oregon and the ranch.

Curtis Martin
North Powder, Ore.