

Army Corps is considering five construction options

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to flooding during high river flows.

Butler, who serves on the board of directors for the Santiam Water Control District, said the impacts could be devastating for agriculture in the Mid-Willamette Valley.

"If we can't irrigate, we can't plant vegetable crops. If we can't plant them, then NORPAC is looking for vegetable crops elsewhere," Butler said. "It's going to be an issue."

Farmers are not the only ones who would be impacted. The cities of Salem and Stayton both get their drinking water from the North Santiam, and Detroit Lake is a popular destination for fishing, boating and outdoor recreation that drives tourism in the area.

The Army Corps is currently considering five construction alternatives with varying levels of drawdown at Detroit Lake. Tom Conning, spokesman for the agency's Portland District, said it is still early in the process and will take years to complete an environmental impact study before work can begin in 2021, at the earliest.

Butler said local farmers are not pushing the panic button yet, but they realize how much is at stake.

"The jury's still out," he said. "We have to take a wait-and-see attitude on how they're going to make it happen."

The proposal

Completed in 1953, Detroit Dam is a 450-foot-tall concrete structure on the North Santiam. It provides 321,000 acre-feet of water storage and has a peak electricity generation capacity of 100 megawatts.

It is also a barrier for salmon and steelhead that migrate to the Pacific Ocean before returning up the river as adults to spawn. Over the last 10 years, fewer fish have returned on average into the Upper Willamette Basin compared to the previous 50-year average, according to the Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife which tracks passage at Willamette Falls Dam.

Combined spring and fall chinook returns averaged 11,757 fewer fish per year, or roughly a 24 percent reduction, while winter steelhead returns averaged 3,852 fewer fish, a 41 percent reduction. To protect the species, the National Marine Fisheries Service issued a biological opinion — called a BiOp — in 2008 outlining what the Army Corps needs to do to improve fish survival.

Part of the BiOp includes the project proposed at Detroit Dam, said Conning, the Corps spokesman.

"Basically, (the BiOp) gave us some recommendations for reasonable, prudent actions to take so we did not violate the Endangered Species Act," Conning said.

The plan has two components.

First, the Corps would build a temperature control tower — called a selective withdrawal structure — roughly the height

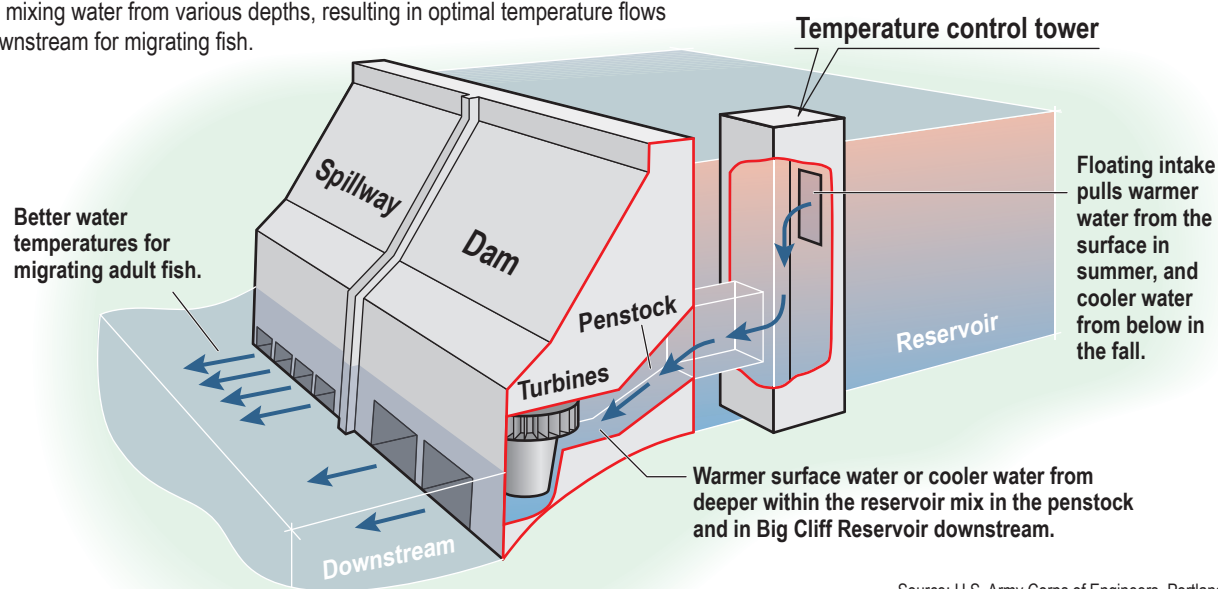


U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

The 450-foot-tall Detroit Dam on the North Santiam River near Detroit, Ore.

Selective Withdrawal Structure explained

The construction of a temperature control tower next to Detroit Dam would allow for mixing water from various depths, resulting in optimal temperature flows downstream for migrating fish.



Source: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Portland District
Alan Kenaga/Capital Press

of a 30-story building next to Detroit Dam. It would mix water from different levels of the reservoir to ensure the water released downstream is neither too warm nor too cold for the fish.

"Salmon need a specific temperature to navigate all the way back to where they originally spawn from," Conning said.

The second component would be a floating screen structure about the size of a football field to capture juvenile fish swimming downstream in the reservoir so they can be moved past the dam either by truck or bypass pipe.

Together, Conning estimated the work will cost between \$100 million and \$250 million. But first, the Corps must complete its environmental impact study evaluating the impacts on everything from aesthetics to the water supply.

"We're getting feedback from the public about their concerns," Conning said.

Five alternatives

For farmers, the chief concern remains how the Corps plans to build the project, and

how that will affect the irrigation supplies.

The alternatives for building the tower at Detroit Dam range from draining the reservoir for two full years — what the agency calls "building in the dry" — to no drawdown whatsoever, or what it calls "building in the wet."

Building in the dry poses the lowest safety risk of the alternatives, but potentially has the greatest impact on water users.

Building in the wet, on the other hand, has the lowest impact on water users, but is the most expensive and dangerous of the five options. Another option involves building a temporary coffer dam around the construction site, allowing the reservoir level to remain higher.

The Santiam Water Control District was formed in 1954 and is responsible for delivering irrigation water to more than 17,000 acres of farmland, along with water to three hydroelectric plants and other uses.

The district also provides the majority of municipal water to the city of Stayton,

population 8,080.

District Manager Brent Stevenson said the project details are still fuzzy, but each of the Corps' five alternatives describes at least one season with reduced or no stored water.

"Early on, it's just really hard to clearly identify what the range of impacts could be," Stevenson said. "The worst case is we don't have water available for the drawdown years."

The value of the crops grown in the area adds up quickly. Marion County is the top agricultural producer in Oregon, according to the 2012 USDA Census of Agriculture, with 286,194 acres of farms generating \$592.8 million in farm gate value. The district provides water to about 6 percent of the county's farms.

Mary Anne Cooper, public policy counsel for the Oregon Farm Bureau, said the organization will submit comments to the Corps, and has big concerns from both an irrigation and flood control perspective.

"There's not a ton of information out there, but one of the plans does look at dewatering the reservoir," Cooper said. "It seems like there's got to be another way to achieve any fisheries objectives that need to be achieved."

Public feedback

The Corps won't release its draft impact study until next year. Until then, Conning said the agency is urging stakeholders to provide feedback that will help it analyze each alternative.

"We need input from the public," he said. "They might know something we don't about how much water they need, or those types of issues."

Steve Keudell, a board member of the Santiam Water Control District and co-owner of Keudell Farms in Aumsville, Ore., said draining Detroit Lake for any period of time could potentially alter the face of farming in this part of the Willamette Valley.

"You'd have to try to raise crops that aren't so dependent on irrigation," Keudell said. "You basically either turn into a dryland farmer, or maybe you'd have to look at drilling irrigation wells. ... There's

Online

More information about the project and a timeline of activities is available on the Army Corps website at <http://www.nwp.usace.army.mil>.

obviously going to be an expense."

In 39 years of farming, Keudell said he has never gone without irrigation water for his fields.

"In our case, all lower ground has water rights on it," he said. "The peppermint and the vegetables get watered every year. There's never been a year, and there won't be a year that I foresee, when you wouldn't need irrigation for that."

On Tuesday, Stevenson submitted four pages of written comments to the Corps on behalf of the district. He asked the Army Corps to complete a detailed "water budget" identifying all legal water rights, which would then be reviewed by the Oregon Water Resources Department to determine exactly which rights would be vulnerable during the project construction.

The district also wants the Corps to analyze which flows may be released from the nearby Big Cliff Dam during construction.

Big Cliff Dam is 2.7 river miles below Detroit Dam, though it does not store nearly as much water and is instead relied upon as a "re-regulation" dam, smoothing out flows from power generation at Detroit Dam.

"It is critical to understand if Bureau of Reclamation stored irrigation water will be available during the construction period," Stevenson wrote in his comments. He added the federal Bureau of Reclamation should be included as a cooperating agency on the project.

For now, Keudell said he is trying not to get too alarmed and carry on business as usual.

"I just don't know how it's going to work," he said.

Farmers are legally required to respond to the census

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"There is still a lot of interest in small farms across the country," he said. "In the Northwest, we have quite a few small farms."

In a statement released late last year, Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue said every response matters.

"The Census of Agriculture is USDA's largest data collection endeavor, providing some of the most widely used statistics in the industry," Perdue said. "Collected in service to American agriculture since 1840, the census gives every producer the opportunity to be represented so that informed decisions can support their efforts to provide the world with food, fuel, feed and fiber."

Farmers are legally required to respond to the census. Individual grower information is kept anonymous and used solely for statistical purposes.

Census surveys can be filled out online or by mail, though online reporting is encouraged. Mertz said surveys take an average of 50 minutes to complete.

"Of course, there are some operations that are small and fairly simple," he said. "Some of the larger, more complicated operations you expect will take a bit longer."

More information is available at www.nass.usda.gov.

'It's not going to be fun for producers. It's not complicated, but it's different'

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having the information on file will help responders react to reports of odors.

The court has twice granted EPA motions to delay the rule. The most recent stay expired Jan. 22. As of Wednesday, the court had neither finalized the order nor granted the EPA more time.

The EPA, in its motion, said it will use the time to contact farmers without internet access, finish a streamlined reporting form and beef up its call center to keep the National Response Center's system from crashing.

The federal government can levy fines of up to \$50,000 a day for not reporting emissions under CERCLA. The law also allows environmental groups to sue to enforce the law.

Efforts to obtain comment from the Waterkeeper Alliance, the lead plaintiff in the lawsuit that led to the mandate,

were unsuccessful.

If the court denies the motion to delay the rule, the EPA has instructed producers to email the National Response Center. Within a month, producers would have to follow up and file a form with EPA regional offices.

"It's not going to be fun for producers. It's not complicated, but it's different," Washington State Dairy Federation policy director Jay Gordon said. "You check the box and then do something more productive."

EPA has detailed how to comply with the mandate on a website: epa.gov/animalwaste

Farms won't have to report every day that their livestock emitted gas. Instead, producers will be able to register their animals as continuously releasing gas.

"The EPA is doing its damndest to be helpful," Gordon said.

It's unclear how many

producers meet the reporting threshold. The EPA estimates 44,900, but that number was derived eight years ago and has not been updated. The National Cattlemen's Beef Association calculated more than 68,000 beef producers will have to report. The U.S. Poultry and Egg Association estimates 141,000 poultry farms will need to report.

The EPA says there are too many geographic, climate and operational factors to estimate emissions by number of animals. Calculation sheets developed by different universities yield different estimates for similar operations.

The EPA says farmers won't be expected to pinpoint emissions, just report a broad range. Farmers won't be required to monitor or reduce emissions.

The U.S. Egg and Poultry Association has developed its own reporting form. The form

includes a boilerplate estimate of emissions.

The National Cattlemen's Beef Association also plans to offer its members a streamlined reporting form when the court makes the mandate final, said Scott Yager, the association's chief environmental counsel.

The association estimates cattle operations with as few as 200 head could meet the reporting threshold based on research conducted on grain-fed cattle in feedlots.

The reporting requirement also applies to cattle in grass pastures. There is no worksheet to calculate emissions from those type of operations, Yager said.

He advised all producers to look into whether they need to report.

"You should complete a worksheet and get it notarized and keep it in your file," Yager said.