

# Environmentalists file lawsuit claiming dams harm fish in Willamette Basin

## Three environmental groups sue federal agencies

By **GEORGE PLAVERN**  
Capital Press

Three environmental groups are suing the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and National Marine Fisheries Service for failing to protect dwindling populations of wild Chinook salmon and winter steelhead in Oregon's Upper Willamette River.

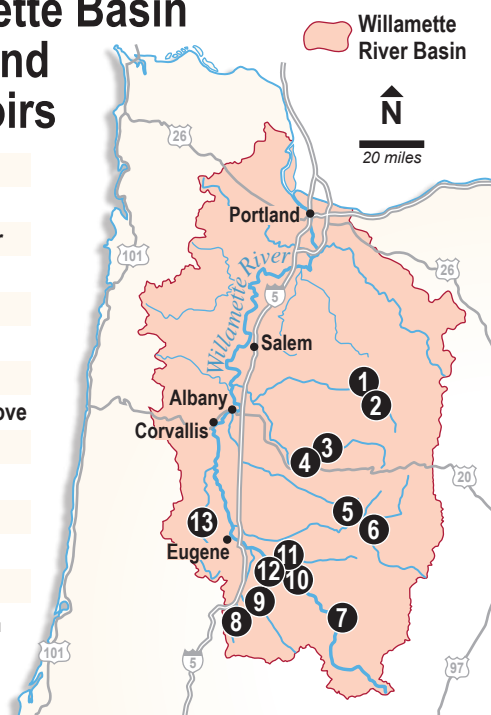
The complaint, filed March 13 in Portland by WildEarth Guardians, the Native Fish Society and Northwest Environmental Defense Center, accuses the agencies of "missed deadlines, postponed actions and poor communications" over the past decade in managing each of 13 Willamette Project dams for the benefit of fish.

The dams are the primary cause of salmon and steelhead declines in the Upper Willamette Basin, blocking hundreds of miles of spawn-

## Willamette Basin dams and reservoirs

1. Big Cliff
2. Detroit
3. Green Peter
4. Foster
5. Blue River
6. Cougar
7. Hills Creek
8. Cottage Grove
9. Dorena
10. Lookout
11. Fall Creek
12. Dexter
13. Fern Ridge

Source: U.S. Bureau of Reclamation  
Alan Kenaga/  
Capital Press



ing habitat and degrading water quality and habitat downstream, according to the lawsuit.

Research conducted by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration shows that, historically, around 325,000 Chinook salmon and 220,000 winter steelhead swamp up Willamette Falls to spawn in the upper river basin.

Last year, the Oregon Department of Fish & Wild-

life counted 822 steelhead at Willamette Falls — a decline of 99.7 percent.

ODFW also counted 36,628 spring Chinook and 3,462 fall Chinook in 2017. However, the groups contend that just 5,880 of the fish were wild born, with the rest raised in hatcheries.

Marlies Wierenga, Pacific Northwest conservation manager for WildEarth Guardians, said hatchery-born salmon are differ-

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Mary Anne Cooper, public policy counsel for the Oregon Farm Bureau

ent from wild salmon at a genetic level. Hatchery fish are less disease-resistant, don't reproduce as well and are less adaptable to the environment, she said.

"Basically, their entire resilience is diminished," Wierenga said.

Both Upper Willamette steelhead and Chinook salmon were listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act in 1999. In 2008, the National Marine Fisheries Service issued a biological opinion directing the Corps to make structural and operational changes at the dams to stem fish losses.

However, the groups argue the Corps still has not fulfilled many obligations set forth in the opinion.

"Nearly 10 years ago, NMFS determined the Corps' operation of the Willamette dams was likely to jeopardize Chinook and steelhead unless significant changes to the Willamette dam operations were made,"

said Mark Riskdahl, executive director of the Northwest Environmental Defense Center. "NMFS told the Corps that fish passage was a high priority, yet the Corps has dragged its feet in meeting this requirement and others set by NMFS."

Spokesmen for the Corps and National Marine Fisheries Service declined to comment on pending litigation.

The Willamette Project also stores 80,431 acre-feet of irrigation water for 42,675 acres of farmland. Changes to the system could have a significant impact on downstream farmers, said Mary Anne Cooper, public policy counsel for the Oregon Farm Bureau.

"ESA lawsuits around federal system management are very terrifying for farmers," Cooper said. "We know how quickly they can change the status quo if we're not careful."

Cooper said the Farm Bureau is keeping a close

eye on the litigation, which could have a ripple effect on water allocation. Marion County leads Oregon in total value of agricultural products as of the most recent 2012 Census of Agriculture, at more than \$592 million.

While Cooper argues the system is already being managed largely for fish, the lawsuit claims the Corps has "routinely dodged actions, skipped deadlines and sidelined state and federal agencies to avoid improving fish passage at the dams on the Willamette."

Wierenga, with WildEarth Guardians, said the dramatic declines in historical fish numbers represent a failure in action and the lawsuit is intended to spur meaningful action.

"It would be a heartbreaking loss if we Oregonians let these culturally important fish, which have adapted and thrived here for generations, slip away from existence on our watch," Wierenga said.



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## 4-H Helps Kids Contribute To The Complex World Around Them

By **Kym Pokorny, OSU Extension Service**  
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SALEM, Ore. — When the Tomato Growing Club started in 1902, A.B. Graham had no way of knowing his little endeavor would become 4-H and grow into the largest and most effective youth development organization in the country.

More than a century later, Melanie McCabe, a 4-H youth development educator for Oregon State University Extension Service, helps put in perspective the organization's role for the 46,500 4-H members around the state, 1,900 of them in Marion County. The variety of programming has increased, she said, but the heart of 4-H remains the same — helping turn kids into adults who understand and contribute to the complex world around them.

"We reach beyond the traditional programs that people think of like livestock and home ec," said McCabe, who was in 4-H for nine years in a variety of clubs that included beef, ceramics and sewing. "The skills youth learn outside of the project areas are more important than the content of the projects. We spend more time talking about the why. Why do we do what we do? We want to create well-rounded citizens."

Pamela Rose, statewide director of OSU Extension's 4-H program, said that 4-H helps kids find their "spark." Volunteer 4-H leaders — 8,000 of them in Oregon — become mentors and guide participants to the project area they're most passionate about and will build their self-confidence.

McCabe found her spark in public speaking. "I was very shy as a



The first 4-H clubs learned about growing corn and canning tomatoes.

youth," she said. "4-H allowed me to develop my skills and now I'm just as comfortable speaking in front of 500 as I am in front of five. It's a skill I've used repeatedly throughout my life."

Young people can get involved in many activities that catch their interest. In Marion County, 1,200 kids are involved in soccer. Others get to choose from activities like archery and performing arts. Shooting skills is in the future and computer science is underway.

But McCabe reiterates that while kids are engaging in their favorite projects, they're gaining skills such as leadership, responsibility and team building. Even record keeping and — in some clubs — financial literacy are outcomes of involvement in 4-H. She points to friendship as the pinnacle of her experience.

Rose likens 4-H to the hub of a wheel. "Our value resonates from there. As we continue to achieve excellence the wheel keeps turning. People want to be involved, including youth, parents, leaders, community partners. We have support from 4-H alumni who give back by volunteering or donating their time, talent or treasures. Everyone has talents and treasures and 4-H helps children discover theirs."

The 4-H youth development program is administered by the Oregon State University Extension Service.



4-H Conference — Youth learn together about leadership and citizenship at 4-H Conference.



Toni Veeman is a volunteer 4-H leader who teaches youth about dairy management.



4-H projects like robotics are growing in popularity and keep youth be successful in school.

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