

# First Columbia River Treaty talks ‘very productive’

Next talks will be in British Columbia

By **MATTHEW WEAVER**  
Capital Press

The first two days of negotiating updates to the Columbia River Treaty were “very productive,” U.S. negotiators say.

The talks were May 29-30 in Washington, D.C.

Some provisions of the treaty, adopted in 1964 for cooperative development and operation of water resources in the Columbia River Basin, are set to expire in 2024.

Negotiators spoke during a conference call May 31 following the first round of negotiations to modernize the treaty between the U.S. and Canada.

Media were advised to identify speakers only as “senior U.S. government officials.”

“We’re in the beginning stages and right now we’re just reaffirming cooperation,” one official said. “We’re just laying out what our future objectives are at this point.”

Negotiators are relying on a 2013 regional recommendation developed by the Bonneville Power Administration and U.S. Army Corps



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The Grand Coulee Dam on the Columbia River in Washington state. The first round of negotiations to update the Columbia River Treaty was last week in Washington, D.C.

of Engineers after years of consulting federal agencies, states, tribes and “extensive” stakeholder engagement.

“This is our guide, this is our foundation,” the official said.

U.S. objectives include continued careful management of flood risk, ensuring a reliable and economical power supply and better addressing ecosystem concerns.

Both the U.S. and Canadian

governments have also brought up mitigating any impacts associated with climate change, an official said.

The official declined to go into specific negotiating positions.

When asked by reporters whether the Trump administration had issued “marching orders” or expressed views on the treaty as a good deal or bad deal, the officials reiterated that they were relying on the

regional recommendations.

Asked if Trump’s tariffs on steel and aluminum and renegotiations of the North American Free Trade Agreement would affect negotiations, the official was not aware of any discussions to merge the issues.

“We have no information that suggests these discussions will be impacted at this point,” an official said.

Pacific Northwest tribes and First Nations tribes in Canada have expressed concerns that they don’t have a seat at negotiations, a reporter said.

The officials are “deeply grateful” for the tribes who contributed to the consensus outlined in the 2013 recommendation.

“We value the expertise and experience of the tribes, and the department has maintained regular contact and communications with the tribes,” an U.S. official said. “We will continue to consult with the tribes on a regular basis as negotiations proceed. We are working with the tribes to develop an engagement plan that allows for meaningful consultation throughout the negotiation process.”

The next round of negotiations will be Aug. 15-16 in British Columbia.

# Wheat enters risk period for starch damage in late June

By **MATTHEW WEAVER**  
Capital Press

Washington’s wheat crop will enter the risk period for starch damage in late June, a researcher says.

It’s a matter of when the wheat reaches the anthesis, or flowering, stage, said Camille Steber, a research plant molecular geneticist at the USDA Agricultural Research Service in Pullman, Wash.

At that point, farmers will need to be on the lookout for big temperature fluctuations, Steber said.

“We just did one last night — we went from the 80s yesterday to the 60s today,” she said June 4. “If that happens in the last week of June, then I would worry. Hopefully, by then our temperatures will even out.”

Starch damage, which reduces the quality of baked goods and noodles made with wheat, is measured by a falling number test. Farmers were caught

off guard in 2016 when roughly 44 percent of soft white wheat samples and 42 percent of club wheat samples tested below 300, the industry standard.

The industry estimates starch damage that year cost farmers more than \$30 million in lower prices.

Last summer, temperatures were consistent during the flowering stage, so there were few instances of falling number tests results below 300, Steber said.

In 2017, Steber and her team tested more than 10,000 Washington wheat breeding lines to identify genetic resistance to starch damage. This year, she expects to test more than 11,000 lines, and next year she will begin examining Idaho and Oregon lines.

She provides the information to breeders and expects new wheat varieties will be more resistant to starch damage compared to current varieties.

Currently, the wheat varieties

Cara, Skiles and Mary have the most stable falling number test results over time, she said. Otto is the most stable variety adapted to the drier part of the state.

Steber provides variety information about falling number tests and starch damage on her website and WSU’s Small Grains websites.

“We can only wait and see what the weather does,” she said. “The point where (farmers) could do something is the point where they chose what to plant.”



USDA Agricultural Research Service plant molecular geneticist Camille Steber is testing wheat lines for genetic resistance to starch damage. She said wheat is vulnerable to damage from late June to mid-July, when it is flowering. The damage is often caused by wide swings in temperature.

Capital Press File



Stephen Ward/OSU

Mateus Pasa previously worked for a year at the Mid-Columbia Agricultural Research and Extension Center in Hood River, Ore.

## OSU Extension’s new tree fruit specialist from Brazil

By **GEORGE PLAGVEN**  
Capital Press

A new tree fruit specialist has arrived at Oregon State University Extension just in time for the cherry and pear growing seasons.

Mateus Pasa was hired in April at the OSU Mid-Columbia Agricultural Research and Extension Center in Hood River, Ore. A native of Brazil, Pasa spent four years as a research pomologist at the Santa Catarina Agricultural Research and Extension Center in São Joaquim.

Though he primarily worked with apples during his time in Santa Catarina, Pasa will be responsible for finding ways to improve fruit set and production for pears and cherries in the Columbia River Gorge.

“The growers and the fruit industry are very supportive,” Pasa said. “I’m working to help them fix their main prob-

lems, and to get better and more efficient and make their orchards more profitable.”

Pasa is no stranger to the region. During his doctorate program, he spent a year at MCAREC working with Todd Einhorn studying the effects of prohexadione calcium — a chemical used to thin trees and reduce fire blight — on the growth of pears.

Pasa now leads the cherry and pear research program at MCAREC, along with Ashley Thompson, who was also hired in April. Pasa said they will continue to develop new rootstocks that allow for planting orchards in higher densities, paving the way for more mechanization and reduced labor costs.

“We need to think ahead and reduce the need for labor,” Pasa said.

Pasa can be reached at MCAREC at 541-386-2030, ext. 38216, or by email at mateus.pasa@oregonstate.edu.

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