

Ag groups say dam plan poses threat

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

Representatives of Northwest agriculture believe U.S. Rep. Mike Simpson's plan to tear down four dams on the Snake River is unlikely to go anywhere in Congress, but say that it poses a particular threat to their industry.

Simpson has floated a \$33.5 billion plan to boost salmon recovery, remove four dams on the lower Snake River and impose a 35-year moratorium on dam-related environmental litigation. He said he would incorporate feedback from farm groups "where possible."

No legislation has been introduced.

The plan has drawn opposition from agricultural stakeholders, power companies and environmental groups.

When Simpson first announced the plan in February, he suggested that it could be included in President Joe Biden's \$2 trillion to \$3 trillion national clean energy stimulus bill.

"We believe the details of the Biden plan will become more clear in the coming months and it is too early to make a determination of what will be included in the final bill," a representative of Simpson told the Capital Press.

The Idaho Farm Bureau Federation believes Simpson's plan poses more of a threat to agriculture because it is a "very specific plan," putting a dollar figure and timeline on dam removal, said Sean Ellis, the Farm Bureau's spokesman.

Simpson's plan doesn't appear to have support in Congress, Ellis said.

"Idaho Farm Bureau hopes it fades away for good," he said. "We will continue to vigorously oppose this plan, if it moves forward in the current language or different language."

"Any time you have a leader in the Northwest express openness to the



Nicholas K. Geranios/AP File

This shows an elevated fish ladder designed to help migrating fish swim through the Lower Granite Dam on the Snake River near Almota, Wash.

idea of removing significant pieces of federal infrastructure, it gets people's attention," said Kristin Meira, executive director of the Pacific Northwest Waterways Association.

Meira agrees that Simpson's plan is not ripe for immediate movement this year.

"Every line in (Simpson's proposal) represents either a significant shift in federal policy, funding or infrastructure," Meira said. "Every single line would need to have likely years of significant federal study and likely major changes to authorization before anything new or different would ever take place. These are not small actions that are being proposed."

A moratorium on litigation would require significant changes to "bedrock" environmental laws, Meira added.

"There is not a special set of laws in the Northwest that provides exemptions or special dispensation for our projects when compared to other regions," she said. "That element of the congressman's proposal is one that we feel is unlikely to be able to move forward."

The idea of dam removal has been around for a long time and will likely

continue, said Glen Squires, CEO for the Washington Grain Commission.

Simpson's plan may pose more of a threat than other proposals, Squires said, but "the underlying facts remain the same, and even Rep. Simpson isn't sure the whole scheme will actually recover salmon."

Meira and Squires say some elements of the plan do need support, such as predator control.

Simpson's focus on increased funding for salmon recovery should move forward "straight away," Meira said.

"I think that's something that every single resident of the Northwest can support, as long as that funding and those actions are in pursuit of science-based efforts that will have demonstrable benefits for fish runs and the species that rely on our fish, like orca," she said.

Simpson's plan ultimately provided a "unique opportunity" to better explain to the region what the dams mean for agriculture and hydropower, Meira said.

A continued "very narrow focus" on removing the dams gets the conversation off-track and ultimately doesn't help Northwest fish, she said.

California likely to face a critically dry year

By SIERRA DAWN MCCLAIN
Capital Press

Sierra Nevada snowpack at the end of March remains 39% below average — the same as when the month began — and California farmers fear a drier-than-usual summer.

Farmers had been hoping for March storms, but the month wrapped up unusually dry.

"Hopes for a March miracle have dissipated," California Farm Bureau Federation wrote in a statement this week.

According to a March 30 report from the California Department of Water Resources, or CDWR, the average statewide snow water equivalent was just 17.1 inches. The Sierra snowpack, according to officials, normally supplies about 30% of California's water.

CDWR's recent manual surveys show the state had already faced five consecutive months of below average snow and precipitation, so a dry March compounded an already serious problem. Farmers statewide are bracing for a summer of potential drought, limited water supplies and another fire season.

CDWR Director Karla Nemeth said in a statement that unless a series of strong storms hit this spring, the state would end up with "a critically dry year on the heels of last year's dry conditions."

"With back-to-back dry years, water efficiency and drought preparedness are more important than ever for communities, agriculture and the environment," said Nemeth of the department.

According to CDWR, California's reservoirs are already showing the impacts of a second consecutive dry year. Shasta Lake, the state's largest reservoir, was at about 68% of average for March and Lake Oroville was at 55% of average.

Availability of water will impact allocations for California farms. Last week, both state and federal water projects announced they would reduce or delay deliveries due to the dry winter and other restrictions.

In December, CDWR had announced an initial allocation of 10%. The department last week amended its projected allocation amount, saying it expects to deliver only 5% of requested supplies.

Scout to do environmental study on wind, solar project

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

A renewable energy developer says it will prepare an environmental impact statement for a large wind and solar power project in south-central Washington.

Scout Clean Energy withdrew Monday its application for an expedited review by the Energy Facility Site Evaluation Council, a process open to power projects without a significant environmental impact.

The council had yet to make that determination, but the Colorado company acknowledged in a letter to the council manager, Sonia Bumpus, that it would likely have to address environmental impacts.

The 1,150-megawatt project — by far the largest renewable energy plan ever presented to the council — would disturb shrub-steppe habitat.

The company is confident the Horse Heaven Wind Farm will pass an environmental review, Scout spokeswoman Javon Smith said. The study will assure that the public has a chance to comment, she said.

"We want to make sure people are involved and have every opportunity to weigh

in," she said.

Final approval, with or without an environmental impact statement, will rest with Gov. Jay Inslee, based on the council's recommendations. Inslee has made renewable energy a pillar of his climate agenda.

Scout proposes to install solar panels and as many as 244 wind turbines in Benton County, near the Tri-Cities. The turbines and panels would help the state achieve carbon-free electricity, according to Scout.

Scout has leased thousands of acres from farmers and ranchers. The leases will provide steady income, and the project won't take much land, according to a wheat farmer speaking on behalf of landowners.

The proposal has run into opposition from local officials. Pasco port commissioners passed a resolution opposing the project, calling the Tri-Cities' wide-open spaces and unobstructed ridges "iconic features."

Almost all wind projects are in southeastern Washington, but environmental justice means no group should bear a disproportionate share of negative environmental consequences, the resolution states.

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