

Cat Creek hydro project makes progress

By BRAD CARLSON
Capital Press

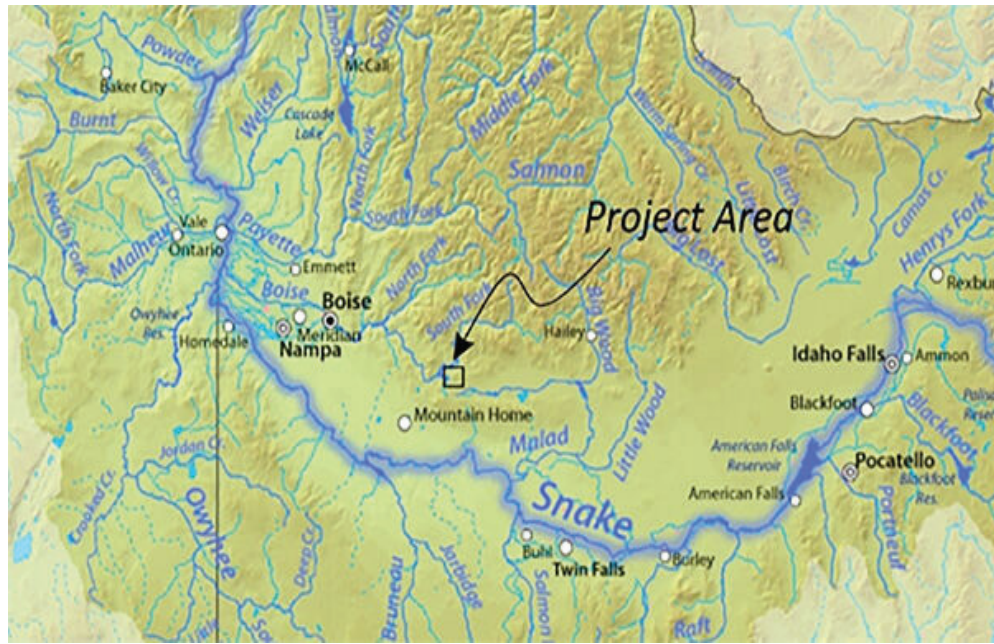
Developers of a unique pumped-storage hydropower project planned upstream from Anderson Ranch Reservoir in Idaho say it will also include wind and solar power generation.

The Boise-based Cat Creek Energy LLC's pre-application document filed with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission provides detailed information about the project.

Project consultant Dave Tuthill of Idaho Water Engineering in Boise said the pre-application initiates a formal commission approval process. The filing triggered a comment period through Feb. 11.

Cat Creek's plan has been in the works for about eight years. It already is under consideration by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, the Idaho Department of Water Resources, and the state Department of Environmental Quality. Idaho Fish and Game also is a participant.

Project elements include



Location of the proposed Cat Creek Energy and Water Storage Renewable Power Station.

wind, solar and hydroelectric power generation, and a new reservoir upstream from the Anderson Ranch Reservoir.

Elmore County has already granted conditional-use approval to Cat Creek's wind, solar, pumped-storage hydro, transmission and substation components.

Developers aim to pump

water up to the Cat Creek reservoir when electricity is cheap — like when the wind is blowing and the sun is shining — and release it back downstream to generate hydropower when electricity is more expensive.

Concerns raised over the years include potential impacts on fish, wildlife,

the environment and water rights, and the extent to which Cat Creek would need to buy power for pumping.

Tuthill said concerns about water-temperature impacts on fisheries will be addressed by "an extensive monitoring and modeling effort defined in the (pre-application document)." Cat Creek's proposal

includes up to 39 wind turbines and a 480-acre solar array. Supplemental power from wind and solar generation may be used to offset the pumping load, the document said.

The 720-megawatt project would be integrated into the power grid.

Tuthill said goals include producing power for Idaho and the West, making solar and wind power available more consistently by storing water in the upper reservoir, "which functions like a battery," and increasing water supply for irrigation and other uses.

He said that of the Cat Creek reservoir's 100,000 acre-feet of water, 20,000 would be needed to operate the pumped-storage hydropower system and 80,000 would be available for downstream uses.

A separate plan by the Bureau of Reclamation and the Idaho Water Resource Board would store an additional 29,000 acre-feet in Anderson Ranch Reservoir by raising the 413-foot dam by 6 feet. The reservoir

is on the South Fork Boise River. Its current capacity is 413,000 acre-feet.

A business entity filing with the Idaho Secretary of State's office lists John Faulkner of Gooding as Cat Creek Energy LLC's registered agent. The Idaho Mountain Express newspaper in May reported the Faulkner sheep-ranching family proposes the project.

The pre-application document estimates it would generate annual output worth \$60.4 million and annual earnings of \$19.8 million. Earnings estimates are based on national modeling and could change.

The pumped-storage hydro portion would cost around \$2 billion to construct "and will have long-term benefits for the community in taxes, jobs and services," said Peggy Beltrone, a public policy adviser for Cat Creek Energy.

Cat Creek representatives told FERC in the pre-application document that they expect to submit a draft license application in summer 2023.

WSU AgWeatherNet to offer its first weather school

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

WSU Weather School
<https://weather.wsu.edu/?p=119750>

The new Washington State University AgWeatherNet school will help farmers set up weather stations in their fields during an online class next month.

The free school will be offered virtually at 7:50 a.m. Feb. 4.

The school will show stakeholders how the weather network collects and uses data from 200 public stations and about 200 private stations, delivering data to 13,000 registered users and other state residents.

At its peak during the summer and winter, the network web portal has 100,000-plus visitors per day, said Lav Khot, network

director.

Many growers have established private weather stations. Khot wants to help them set up and maintain the stations so the data is useful.

In 2020, the network initiated a program to incorporate approved private weather stations into its network of federal stations and AgWeatherNet-maintained stations.

Stations installed by AgWeatherNet maintain particular protocols. Some of the private stations are showing maintenance issues, which affects data quality, Khot said.

"The purpose of this weather school is to let stakeholders gauge whether they really need a private station or a network like ours is sufficient," he said.

The school was requested by farmers, said Gwen Hoheisel, regional specialist and director of WSU Extension in Benton County.

Many farmers are noticing a difference between commercial weather stations set up in-field compared to out of field, she said.

Public weather stations from AgWeatherNet or NOAA are set up in an open

field, not in the middle of an apple orchard or blueberry field, she said.

"If you're trying to model something that's happening in your orchard, potato field or crop, having a weather station as close as possible with that real data is really important," she said. "There's going to be people that would like more precise information."

Farmers should leave the school knowing how to purchase and establish an on-farm weather station, Hoheisel said.

The school will include site selection, maintenance and how to collect and use data.

They should also be able to assess data from other public or private sources, Hoheisel said.



WSU

A Washington State University AgWeatherNet system monitors conditions in a hop yard.

Technology has improved over the past decade, Khot said.

Sensors on stations are becoming smaller and more compact, and easier to install and maintain, he said.

Previously, most network data was collected 5 to 6 feet above ground level, adhering to National Weather Service protocols, but as the state transitions to towers as part of building a "mesonet" network, researchers are also collecting wind and air temperature data at about

30 feet above ground level, Khot said, giving a better representation of temperature inversion scenarios specific to a particular site.

"In the next few years, we will have about 100 of these towers collecting professional-plus quality weather data," he said.

The weather school may become an annual event, Khot said.

"We want to make the weather a little bit more meaningful to the growers," he said.

Washington high court shuts door on builders' veto appeal

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

OLYMPIA — The Washington Supreme Court has declined to hear a challenge to a partial veto by Gov. Jay Inslee in 2019 that nixed three projects that would have protected farmland.

Inslee also vetoed a subsection in the same bill that made higher fines for disturbing riverbeds dependent on approving the projects.

The Building Industry Association of Washington claimed the governor exceeded his authority by vetoing less than an entire section, foiling what lawmakers intended.

Lower courts didn't rule on the veto, but rejected BIAW's suit, ruling the group didn't have standing to sue because none of its members have been levied the higher fines.

BIAW attorney Jackson Maynard Jr. said Thursday he's disappointed the court declined to hear the appeal, but that the BIAW will continue to press the issue in court.

The BIAW already has filed a separate lawsuit in Thurston County Superior Court claiming that Fish and Wildlife raised fines to

\$10,000 a day from \$100 after an unlawful veto.

"One way or another, we're going to get this illegal veto challenged," Maynard said.

The attorney general's office argued that disputes over the governor's veto powers should be worked out between the governor and Legislature.

Although the BIAW is concerned about builders facing \$10,000 per day fines, the dispute rose over opposition to proposed river projects in Grays Harbor, Snohomish and Whatcom counties.

Lawmakers who backed the projects hoped to encourage work to keep farmland from eroding while also enhancing fish habitat. The proposed projects raised the possibility of removing gravel from rivers.

In his veto message, Inslee said the farmland projects didn't belong in the bill, which dealt with orca recovery.

The attorney general argued that cagey lawmakers crafted the bill to try to force Inslee to accept projects he opposed in return for the higher fines he supported.

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