

Tour touts Snake River dam benefits, other Western issues

By **MATTHEW WEAVER**
Capital Press

PASCO, Wash. — Removing the four lower Snake River dams would mean the equivalent of losing enough electricity to power all the households in Seattle, Portland, Spokane and Boise, agricultural stakeholders told members of Congress last week.

Removing the dams would take out 1,000 average megawatts of carbon dioxide-free power and 2,500 average megawatts of carbon dioxide-free peaking capacity, said Kurt Miller, executive director of Northwest RiverPartners, a hydropower advocacy group based in Vancouver, Wash.

Washington Rep. Dan Newhouse, chairman of the Western Congressional Caucus, coordinated the tour for caucus members. The tour showcased the river as a source of power and water and a transportation corridor.

The biggest misconception about the dams has to do with the ability of salmon to

migrate past the dams, Newhouse said.

Adult salmon and steelhead passage is 96-99% at each dam using fishways, according to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Juvenile survival at the dams is greater than 96% at each dam. Juvenile transport survival to Bonneville is typically 98%.

The lowest survival and least used route for juveniles is turbine passages, according to the corps. A new turbine design program is underway, and the goal is 98% survival.

Proponents of taking out the dams argue that fish passage is inadequate.

Idaho Farm Bureau president Bryan Searle referenced Idaho Republican Rep. Mike Simpson's \$33.5 billion proposal to benefit salmon recovery by breaching the dams.

Simpson has been a "good friend" and longtime ally of the Farm Bureau on many challenges, Searle said.

"But there's one item that we definitely disagree (on), and we've been very open —



Matthew Weaver/Capital Press

Rep. Dan Newhouse, R-Wash., center, speaks to media in front of Ice Harbor Dam near Pasco, Wash. With him are other members of the Western Congressional Caucus: Rep. Matt Rosendale, R-Mont.; Rep. Cliff Bentz, R-Ore.; Rep. Bruce Westerman, R-Ark.; and Rep. Mariannette Miller-Meeks, R-Iowa.

we sit around the table on a regular basis and we discuss it very openly," he said. "All I can say is, it just appears to me like he has a personal, spiritual love for salmon that I can't even comprehend."

Simpson's plan has opened the door for further calls to

breach the dams, said Heather Stebbings, executive director of the Pacific Northwest Waterways Association.

"I am absolutely, 100% convinced that this is a gateway to trying to get rid of every dam on the system," Miller said.

Leaders of the state Farm Bureaus for the four states in the West worked to put the dams and other industry challenges in context for the lawmakers.

Angela "Angi" Bailey, president of the Oregon Farm Bureau, said she hears the most about natural disaster and "beyond extreme" drought conditions when visiting growers.

"There's a real sense of desperation," she said. "There's not a section of Oregon, north to south, east to west, corner to corner, that wasn't affected by some natural disaster this last year, and the drought conditions continue."

Washington Farm Bureau president Rosella Mosby said farmers are "over-regulated and under-represented."

She pointed to environmental buffers, affordable housing availability for workers and the effect of labor requirements on food banks.

"All of those extras that go to food banks come from overtime hours worked on a farm,"

she said. "When farmers are considering how to utilize their crews in a field, if you are cutting back on your hours in order to make your margins work, the extras in your cooler, first in, first out, that don't go to the food bank."

Jamie Johansson, president of the California Farm Bureau, talked about a "bureaucrat" recently suggesting using a forest post-wildfire to build affordable housing and store carbon.

"Fabulous idea, you should have been here 40 years ago when they were chaining themselves to the redwood trees and killing the industry," Johansson said. "Problem is, you ran the mills off. You ran off the support industry behind it, and to get that back, it's almost insurmountable when you look at what the costs are going to be. We're going to have those challenges in agriculture. ... If you want to get rid of agriculture, get rid of the support groups and the businesses we need to sell to."

Boise River managers boost water stored in Lucky Peak Reservoir

By **BRAD CARLSON**
Capital Press

Water managers June 6 started increasing flows into Lucky Peak Reservoir on the Boise River.

The move means more water will be available for irrigation, fisheries, recreation and power production this summer.

Unusually wet, cold conditions in April and much of May enabled managers to store more water than anticipated, said Ryan Hedrick, a hydrologist with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation's Middle Snake Field Office in Boise.

Spring conditions "allowed us to store more water," he said.

Heavy snow in late December and early January was followed by mostly dry conditions through March. Hedrick said the rain, high-elevation snow and low temperatures boosted water supply and decreased early demand.

"Irrigation demand stayed down, so they weren't using as much water," he said. "We were able to store that, too."

The river's three main dams are Anderson Ranch, Arrowrock and Lucky Peak. Reclamation owns Anderson Ranch, which is the largest and the farthest upstream, and Arrowrock. The Corps owns Lucky Peak, farthest downstream and closest to Boise.

Hedrick said Reclamation, in cooperation with the Corps, will raise Lucky Peak's water level by about two feet a day until the reservoir reaches nearly full pool. The water comes from Arrowrock, which is full. Anderson Ranch was about three-quarters full on June 5.

To the north and west, Reclamation in early June began increasing flows out of Cascade Reservoir into the North Fork Payette River to help with flood risk management, he said.

"Early in the year, projections showed Cascade and Deadwood reservoirs possibly would not fill," Hedrick said. "But due to the wet, cold spring, we are seeing likely full reservoirs going into the summer."

Ranchers oppose ESA listing for bats in 37 states

By **CAROL RYAN DUMAS**
Capital Press

The Public Lands Council and National Cattlemen's Beef Association oppose protecting the northern long-eared bat as endangered under the federal Endangered Species Act.

The bat is currently listed as threatened, but the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service just closed a comment period on changing that listing to endangered.

PLC and NCBA oppose that listing for many reasons, said Sigrid Johannes, director of natural resources for PLC and NCBA.

"First of all, the northern long-eared bat is declining in numbers due to a disease, a fungal disease called white-nose syndrome. ... It's not caused by humans and it's not being spread through the activities this listing would prohibit," she said during the latest "Beltway Beef" podcast.

The disease impacts bats when they're hibernating in caves, but the listing would put restrictions on forest management activities that take place in the other half of the year,



USFWS

The northern long-eared bat is proposed to be listed as an endangered species.

April to November, when bats are roosting in trees, she said.

In addition, the range of the species in the proposal is 37 states, she said.

"That's another area where we raised some objections because that is including a lot of states where there's actually no documented population of northern long-eared bats.

So it's unnecessarily catching up a lot of areas in a wide net," she said.

There are a lot of issues with the forest implications, particularly wildfire. Among other things, the proposed rule would prohibit tree clearing from April to November of any forb, shrub or tree with a diameter greater than 3 inches at breast height, she said.

That includes pretty much every plant in a mature forest, she said.

"So that is a significant problem when it comes to reducing wildfire risk, reducing fine fuels," she said.

That's particularly galling because prohibiting those management activities is not going to prevent white-nose syndrome from affecting this particular species of bat, she said.

"So it's really a situation where you're putting a stop to a lot of really good and crucial and urgent work for little to no gain or reward for the actual species or for the habitat where they roost," she said.

Another thing to keep in mind is there can be exemptions for those kinds of activities under a threatened designation, but there's no

such equivalent once a species gets bumped up to endangered, she said.

The ESA has a huge impact on ranchers and other resource users who are helping to manage natural resources on federal lands, and PLC and NCBA have worked closely together to mitigate the effects, she said.

"The crux of our argument hasn't changed, and it really boils down to states are the ones who are best positioned to appropriately manage species, wildlife species," she said.

All of the work to conserve species tends to happen in a voluntary basis on the ground led by local stakeholders and communities. That's what PLC and NCBA want to see happen in every case where there's a wildlife situation that needs to be managed, she said.

A federal endangered or threatened designation under ESA puts into place a lot of one-size-fits-all restrictions across the range of the species that don't yield good results for producers or the species and don't really help to conserve habitat in a meaningful way, she said.

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