



'A RUDDERLESS SHIP'

Irrigators struggle with Oregon water policy

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

HOOD RIVER, Ore. — Years of work and millions of dollars invested in raising Kingsley Dam in Oregon's Hood River Valley are about to pay off.

At least, that's the hope of the Farmers Irrigation District, which oversaw the project and footed much of the bill.

Though the reservoir is nearly ready to store more water, the irrigation district fears it may only seldom be used at full capacity.

"We've built a \$5.5 million reservoir expansion that we may not be able to fill," said Les Perkins, FID's general manager.

The project was partially funded by a \$3 million state government grant, which has some complicated strings attached.

As it turns out, those hurdles may be so high that the additional reservoir volume will likely remain unfilled in many years.

The irrigation district couldn't have expected that possibility when it obtained the grant six years ago, Perkins said.

"You just don't know. It's a giant black box," he said.

Agricultural organizations worry such restrictions not only thwart the purpose of



Mateusz Perkowski/Capital Press

Les Perkins, general manager of the Farmers Irrigation District, explains the expansion of the Kingsley Dam and associated reservoir, on which the district's farmers rely for irrigation in Oregon's Hood River Valley.

the grant program but more broadly hinder the state's investments in water supply development.

Complications in way

"Oregon has a way to make the funding more complicated than it needs to be," said April Snell, executive director of the Oregon Water Resources Congress, which re-

resents irrigation districts.

The possibility of encountering expensive and restrictive obstacles can discourage irrigators from seeking state government funding, even when they lack other options, she said.

"If we want more innovative projects, there have to be fewer surprises," Snell said.

The case of Kingsley Dam is illustrative

of the problems cited by critics.

Because the irrigation district accepted the grant money, its new storage water right is subject to stricter environmental conditions.

Additional water can only be diverted into the reservoir during winter if affected stream levels rise above thresholds set by state regulators.

This "seasonal varying flow" requirement is intended to protect fish.

Elevated water levels are needed for adult fish to swim upstream and for juveniles to move downstream. High flows also flush unwanted sediments from spawning habitat and maintain stream channels, among other functions.

The Farmers Irrigation District knew the grant money entailed "seasonally varying flows" and other requirements, such as devoting 25% of the newly stored water for in-stream uses.

However, the irrigation district could not have predicted the exact flow thresholds until the Oregon Water Resources Department completed its analysis of stream data.

While the OWRD's experts believe the reservoir's chances of being filled every year top 90%, the irrigation district is skeptical

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Farmers Irrigation District

Before the project started, the Farmers Irrigation District Kingsley Reservoir held 715 acre-feet of water. The expansion nearly doubles the volume.

Groups worry anti-ag bias clouding housing debate

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

As Oregon's government agencies contemplate upgrading farmworker housing rules, the agriculture industry is worried whether an inherent bias has stacked the debate against growers.

Farmworker housing is likely the next front in the battle over Oregon's regulations for agricultural employers, raising concerns about mounting production costs for labor-intensive crops.

Recent comments by a state employee have also led agriculture groups to question if their perspectives are given a fair hearing.

"It's a very obvious bias

the agencies are allowed to show that is going unchecked by their superiors," said Mary Anne Cooper, vice president of government affairs for the Oregon Farm Bureau.

More stringent farmworker housing standards would further increase expenses for specialty crop growers who are already contending with the phase-in of higher agricultural overtime wages, Cooper said.

Combined with other costly labor requirements imposed in recent years, the financial burden will probably prove too heavy for many orchardists and other farmers who depend on hand labor, she said.

"We're really hitting that tipping point," Cooper said.



George Plaven/Capital Press

Each room at Wafila's farmworker housing facility in Mt. Angel, Ore. has two beds, with 45 total beds available. The debate over increasing farmworker housing standards and enforcement in Oregon has raised concerns about an anti-agriculture bias in the state government.

"I think we're going to see a massive loss of fruit and vegetable production in Oregon."

This summer, a task force

started by Oregon Gov. Kate Brown has begun discussing recommendations for increasing compliance with farm-

worker housing rules.

The task force will also make recommendations for capital improvements to farmworker housing, which would potentially be funded with grants, tax credits, or low-interest loans.

Changes to zoning regulations, water rights and other "barriers" to better housing conditions for farmworkers will be considered by the task force as well.

The task force is an opportunity to make recommendations that may seem "way out there," said Tim Mahern-Macias, community and stakeholder engagement specialist for the Oregon Housing and Community Services Department.

Such recommendations may include altering the state constitution and revising rules for "urban growth boundaries" and "exclusive farm use" zones, Mahern-Macias said during a meeting June 16 with farmworker advocates. A video of that meeting was posted on the agency's website July 6.

"As for ideas, the sky is the limit," he said. "Don't feel boxed in. Don't feel like this is just another run-around."

For example, one concept may be to "compensate a farmer for part of their land" and use it to "build community-based housing" instead of having it run by the employer,

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'Murder hornets' get a new name

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

The Entomological Society of America on Monday asked scientists, government officials, media and public to call Asian giant hornets, popularly known as "murder hornets," by a new name.

The society adopted "northern giant hornet" as its common name for the world's largest wasp. Washington State Department of Agriculture entomologist Chris Looney proposed the name.

"Northern giant hornet is both scientifically accurate and easy to understand, and it avoids evoking fear or discrimination," Entomological Society President Jessica Ware said in a statement.

Until now, the hornet, scientifically known as *Vespa mandarinia*,



Karla Salp/WSDA

An Asian giant hornet, now known as a northern giant hornet.

has not had an official common name, though Asian giant hornet has long been established in scientific papers.

Entomologists have generally shunned "murder hornets," saying the name's sensationalistic, though the name has caught on.

The society has been reviewing names of insects. The society's guidelines discourage names linked to geography or ethnicity, or that

would make people view the insect as loathsome.

Last year, the society dropped "gypsy moth" in favor of "spongy moth," the first product of its Better Common Names Project.

The society also accepted Looney's proposal to name *Vespa soror* the "southern giant hornet." It does not have a popular name, though it is also described in scientific papers as a giant hornet.

The two large hornet species overlap in southern China.

The northern giant hornet ranges north to Japan and the Korean Peninsula. The southern giant hornet ranges south to Vietnam and Cambodia.

Northern giant hornets have been found in northwest Washington and just across the border in British Columbia, but nowhere else in North America.

Officials in both countries are trapping for the invasive species and hope to keep it from being established. The hornets swarm bee hives during what scientists call their "slaughter phase."

Efforts to reach Looney for comment Monday were unsuccessful. In an earlier interview, he said that he proposed "northern giant hornet" to avoid confusion with yet a third hornet species, *Vespa velutina*.

That hornet has reached Europe and is commonly known there as the "Asian hornet."

The similarity between "Asian giant hornet" and "Asian hornet" apparently led a Washington resident to report an Asian giant hornet sighting on a United Kingdom website.

The confusion delayed finding and eradicating a nest in Whatcom County in 2020, according to the state agriculture department.

