

Chris Gaylord/U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Engineers with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers inspect the upstream side gate on the John Day Dam navigation lock July 26 after the gate malfunctioned due to a broken guide wheel.



Damage to John Day Dam's upstream navigation lock gate slows river traffic

By **MATTHEW WEAVER**
 Capital Press

A damaged lower guide wheel on the John Day Dam's upstream navigation lock gate has slowed barge traffic on the Columbia River, but shippers and others say a delay is better than a closure during this especially busy time of year.

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers technicians found the damage July 25 and closed the lock to river traffic. They then moved to limited lockages the next evening, according to a Corps press release.

The lock is operating at a reduced speed, using a floating concrete bulkhead as a temporary gate. It's too early to say how long the reduced speed of operation will continue, Edward "Tom" Conning, public affairs specialist for the Corps, told the Capital Press.

The cause of the damage to the guide wheel is unknown.

"Our initial engineering assessments were generally positive," Conning said. "It appears that many of the damaged parts are salvageable and there doesn't seem to be any damage to the structural gate itself."

Initial estimates put repair costs at \$1 million, Conning said.

"Traffic through John Day Lock is slower than normal, but we don't expect further reductions or a complete loss of service at this time," he said. "Our focus is getting the lock back into full service."

"Overall, we've been very fortunate ... that the Corps found a workaround in pretty rapid fashion," said Kurt Haarmann, senior vice president of the grain division for Columbia Grain International. "Just having the workaround, even if it's a bit slower, allows us to maintain navigation and shipments (and) keep moving growers' products to market."

The delays require companies to predict

shipping needs more accurately and a little farther into the future, Haarmann said.

"It's certainly much better than an outright closure given the amount of production that is upstream of that lock," he said.

"We're in a critical time right now at the beginning of harvest, and there's going to be a lot of grain that needs to be moved — a lot of export sales that we've made that we need to execute upon and a lot of sales the growers have made, and they need that space upcountry to be able to deliver," he said.

Shipping wheat by rail and truck are alternatives, he said.

"Neither of those systems can really supplant the vast majority that goes by the river," he said. "In the short run, you would probably end up with more ground piles or temporary emergency ground storage."

Haarmann pointed to the expense of using trucks with increased diesel costs, the distance involved and wear and tear on the roads and environment.

The John Day situation highlights the value of the shipping system for the public, Haarmann said.

"(The dams) are absolutely critical to Pacific Northwest farmers and their transportation of goods to the export markets," he said. "I think it brings it front and center, and hopefully in a different light as a reminder, and not necessarily purely the environmental or fish discussion."

Portland District locks on the Columbia River handle 10 million of the 50.5 million tons of cargo shipped annually in the nation.

The Columbia River is the No. 1 U.S. export gateway for wheat and barley, the No. 2 U.S. export gateway for corn and soy, and the No. 1 U.S. export gateway for West Coast mineral bulk.

The Columbia River system is also the national leader for wood exports and auto imports and exports.

OSU Blueberry Field Day highlights new research

By **SIERRA DAWN MCCLAIN**
 Capital Press

AURORA, Ore. — Dozens of people sporting hats and sunglasses taste-tested berry varieties and licked blueberry popsicles while listening to scientists from Oregon State University, USDA and other institutions talk about new research at OSU's Blueberry Field Day last week.

The findings, presented at the North Willamette Research and Extension Center, could help growers.

Crop inputs

One recent study, led by USDA researchers David Bryla and Scott Orr, found that applying calcium to soil can affect yield and quality.

"Calcium impacts fruit quality," said Bryla.

If applied properly, the researchers found that calcium can improve fruit firmness and extend berries' shelf life.

In a separate, ongoing study, OSU faculty research assistant Amanda Davis and co-researchers aim to answer a popular question growers ask: Does adding humic acid to a regular fertilizer program improve soil quality and yield in mature blueberries? Trials to answer this started in 2021, and researchers expect results in 2023.

Pests

A new pesticide for blueberries may be in the pipeline. According to Dani Lightle, OSU pesticide registration research leader, the EPA soon plans to evaluate Applaud Insect Growth Regulator, a product that targets mealybugs and other pests, for use in blueberries.

The industry is also turning to biological controls.

An invasive fruit fly — the spotted wing drosophila — affecting Northwest blue-



Sierra Dawn McClain/Capital Press

Blueberries at OSU's North Willamette Research and Extension Center in Aurora.

berries may meet its match in a tiny parasitoid wasp called *Ganaspis brasiliensis*.

This summer, OSU has been releasing the beneficial wasps near farms across Oregon in hopes that the wasps will control the spotted wing drosophila.

Rearing and releasing the wasps, however, takes time.

"The wasps are rather high maintenance, so it's been a learning curve," said Jana Lee, research entomologist for USDA's Horticultural Crops Research Unit.

Irrigation

Jesse Carroll, a graduate student at OSU, recently worked with Bryla, of USDA, to test pulsed irrigation — the practice of applying water in short intervals each day — in blueberries.

Carroll's initial study found that pulsing water can significantly increase yield and berry size.

"The pulsed drip irrigation method seemed to be promising," said Carroll.

Further research is needed.

Pruning and trellising

Pruning and trellising practices can significantly impact yield, according to results from a six-year trial led by Davis, the faculty research assistant, and Ber-

nadine Strik, recently retired from leading the berry research program at OSU's North Willamette Research and Extension Center.

The trial in Legacy and Mini Blues varieties found that pruning and trellising according to recommended methods can improve fruit quantity and quality. Although pruning demands more labor, the higher labor cost was outweighed by higher yield.

Breeding

The Vaccinium Coordinated Agricultural Project, a USDA-funded project led by researchers from around the world, is developing new genetic tools to enhance breeding of blueberries.

USDA is similarly evaluating the potential of genetic markers for predicting fruit quality and ripening season.

New leadership

Oregon's blueberry industry also has a new research leader.

Strik, who had led the berry research program since 1992 before retiring this winter, has passed on her position to OSU horticultural expert Scott Lukas, who is transitioning into his new role.

"The program is in fantastic hands," said Strik.



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