

Dams

Continued from Page 1

Inslee acknowledged that the question of whether to breach the dams is “deeply personal to the many communities and Tribes engaged in this debate.”

Agricultural stakeholders responded to the final report.

“We appreciate Senator Murray and Governor Inslee’s recognition of the importance of our farmers, the food they produce, and the barge transportation and irrigation that many of them rely on, to our region and nation,” Washington Grain Commission CEO Glen Squires said in a press release. “Now is not the time to make such great changes which would hurt U.S. farmers and significantly impact U.S. competitiveness in the global market, costing us trade, jobs, and economic stability here in the Northwest.”

Squires is also president of the Pacific Northwest Waterways Association (PNWA) the nonprofit trade association that advocates for regional navigation, energy, trade and economic development.

PNWA executive director Heather Stebbings, executive director of the Pacific Northwest Waterways Association, was pleased to see Murray and Inslee recognize the importance of the dams for the economy and the environment.

“We share their concern about the future of the salmon and agree that there are many efforts in the region that can take place outside of breaching that would have significant positive benefits for the fish,” Stebbings said in a press release. “We stand ready to help where we can, and to advocate for future funding to ensure that programs like habitat and ecosystem restoration, toxics reduction, predator abatement and more can be established, and that our federal agen-

cies can better understand ecosystem impacts on the full lifecycle of our iconic fish.”

“While we appreciate Senator Murray and Governor Inslee’s acknowledgment of the critical role these dams play for agriculture and recognition of the lack of feasibility in breaching the dams in the current environment, Washington wheat growers remain opposed to any actions by federal or state governments that leave dam breaching on the table,” said Michelle Hennings, executive director of the Washington Association of Wheat Growers. “Simply put, the benefits provided by barges cannot be replaced by other methods of transportation ... The Lower Snake River Dams allow wheat farmers in Washington and across the country to efficiently transport their product in a way that provides significant benefits to both the economy and environment, and most importantly, helps farmers feed peo-

ple around the world.”

WAWG remains committed to working alongside government officials and the broader stakeholder community to achieve “science-based solutions” for a healthy salmon population, and support the viability of family-owned farms and businesses, Hennings said.

“Farmers, and the industries that support them, believe that salmon and dams can and do co-exist and that we can have healthy rivers and a healthy economy,” Leslie Druffel, outreach director for the McGregor Co. and inland ports and navigation group co-chair for PNWA, stated in the press release. “We are looking forward to contributing to the conversation and to supporting a basin-wide approach to salmon recovery going forward.”

Kurt Miller, executive director of Northwest RiverPartners, called Inslee and Murray’s recommendation a win for farmers and electricity customers.

“(They) recognize the critical role the Lower Snake River dams play in maintaining an affordable, reliable, clean electric grid and their role in making agriculture possible in different regions of the Northwest, through irrigation and barging,” Miller said. “That was a huge recognition.”

Sean Ellis, spokesman for the Idaho Farm Bureau, disagreed with the report’s assertion that the river system is operating under the status quo, and that dam removal is the only option.

“The region has implemented \$17 billion in improvements designed to benefit salmon populations and stakeholders are always looking to improve the river system for its multiple uses, which include fish passage, hydroelectric generation capacity, navigation capacity and recreation,” Ellis said. “We are seeing some of the benefits of those investments in the river system in the most recent salmon run numbers.”

Candidates

Continued from Page 1

CP: What marching orders will you give the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality?

Johnson: “Big ones. I want that agency to stop torturing Oregonians and to help Oregonians.

“Frequently, DEQ’s answer has been no — to everything. I want can-do, want-to, will-do people running state agencies. I want them to start at yes. I want agencies with regulatory authority to work with farmers and not constantly be looking for fault or wanting to over-regulate.”

Drazan: “My favorite thing that’s going to happen on my first day is asking all the agency heads to turn in their resignations — all of them. And we’re going to sit down and have a conversation.

“My commitment to Oregonians is to lead in a new direction. We’re not going to get that done if you keep the entire bureaucratic machine cranking along like nothing’s changed. I have an expectation that my agency heads are expert in the subject matter, committed to customer service, to being problem-solvers, to getting to ‘yes’ first and ‘no’ second and to partnering with Oregonians rather than standing as a barrier.”

Kotek: “I think one of the biggest issues right now is to make sure (DEQ has) the resources and staff power to meet current regulations.

“Nothing is more frustrating for me than to hear someone say, ‘I want to expand my business, but it’s taking 18 months to get my new water permit or my air permit renewed.’

“The other issue is making sure our rulemaking processes and rules are inclusive. Oregonians support regulations that have goals.

“We believe in clean water, clean air — we all agree on that. And things have to be set up in a way that businesses can function.”

CP: Oregon’s new Advanced Clean Trucks rule requires manufacturers to sell a certain percentage of zero-emission vehicles, including heavy-duty trucks, starting with the 2024 model year. Critics say the rules will raise truck prices and push a fleet of electric vehicles on rural communities that don’t yet have charging infrastructure. What’s your response?

Johnson: “Well, we gotta’ slow (the timeline) down. Where’s the infrastructure? I don’t think the technology has caught up with the reality of what exists on the ground. And at what cost?

“We cannot address Oregon’s minor contribution to global climate change on the backs of rural communities that were asked to unfairly



Betsy Johnson



Christine Drazan



Tina Kotek

bear the economic cost of implementation.”

Does Johnson support a move toward more electric vehicles?

“Sure, sure. But we’re going faster than it can be implemented on the ground right now,” she said.

Drazan: “I do not support an end position of a mandate around what equipment is used by Oregonians.

“This move towards electric vehicles right now doesn’t meet all the needs. There’s not adequate charging infrastructure. The grid can’t support it. “You can’t put the cart before the horse. In some cases, these political agendas force people off of a bridge to nowhere.”

Does Drazan support transportation electrification?

“As we move to new technologies that are low-emissions, I would support (voluntary) incentive-based movement in that direction,” she said.

Kotek: “If we’re going to have new regulation(s), we have to put public money on the table to help people achieve conversion.

“What we all understand is, we have to transition to cleaner engines. How do you make that happen? I think we have to put more urgency behind our electrification plans as a state.

“The good thing is, with the federal infrastructure package, we have more resources coming down from the federal government than we’ve ever had.

“The thing I always ask in transition conversations is: Does the timeline work for folks? The goal is to have it happen, not to put something in place just to say we put it in place. If the timeline has to be reassessed, we have to reassess it, ‘cause the goal is to get people to cleaner vehicles.”

CP: California air regulators voted on Aug. 25 to phase out vehicles that run on fossil fuel, culminating in a total ban on sales of new gas-powered cars, pickup trucks and SUVs by 2035. Washington regulators plan to follow California’s lead, and under Gov. Kate Brown, Oregon is also potentially poised to follow suit. If you’re elected, will you adopt or reject this policy?

Johnson: “We need a government that does things with Oregonians, not to Oregonians.

“We need to provide

more options to reduce fossil fuel use, but I am opposed to heavy-handed mandates that reduce choice and drive up costs on consumers and companies.”

“How dare the governor consider doing this without public hearings or legislative action. It’s just one more assault on rural economies, farmers, ranchers, loggers and anyone who can’t afford a Tesla.”

Drazan: “Once again, bureaucrats in the Brown administration are pushing a political agenda that goes well beyond their authority.

“People are already struggling with an out-of-control cost of living and skyrocketing inflation. Now, Governor Brown’s administration wants to make life even more costly for hardworking Oregonians, all in the name of a political agenda that is out-of-touch with everyday people.

“This proposal is dead on arrival. As governor, I’ll repeat it on day one.”

Kotek: “Policies like this will help make zero-emission cars more affordable and accessible and will ultimately help Oregonians reduce pollution, improve air quality and save money over time.

“I’d support adopting a policy that’s tailored to meet Oregon’s needs.”

CP: Do you support Oregon’s existing water rights system under the doctrine of Prior Appropriation, or “first in time, first in right,” in which the person with the oldest water right on a stream has seniority and is the last to face a shutoff?

Johnson: “Our water rights system is very complicated. Before politicians change the system, they need to get everybody at the table.

“We need to convene the parties and have a conversation about: What does changing the water rights really mean?”

“But I don’t want somebody to come away with the opinion that I’m for changing the water rights system.

“What I’m supportive of is, if there is a problem statement that people agree on, what’s the statement? Is it that the water rights system is too complicated? Is it that some are getting deprived of water? I would want to have some collective understanding of: What are we solving for?”

Drazan: “I support our existing water rights system.”

Would Drazan try to maintain the system if it was

challenged?

“I would,” she said. “And just to be clear, I don’t think any system is perfect. I do believe in the ability to be flexible. I think that needs to be a stronger, more dominant characteristic of our state government in particular, that we’re responsive to local needs, but as a principle, and as a construct under which we all operate, I support the existing system.”

Kotek: “It is the fundamental starting place for how water is utilized in the state. It is the law. It is the starting point, yes.”

However, Kotek said she is open to conversations about potentially changing other laws. For example, under Oregon water law, if a water rights holder does not use the full water right for five consecutive years, that user could forfeit the right. Kotek expressed concern over this.

“Some people say, ‘If I don’t use my water, I will lose my rights.’ When I listen to that, I’m like, ‘OK, does that make sense when the third person down the line also needs water?’ Right?” said Kotek.

“So, how do you have thoughtful conversations about assessing that? The starting point is where we are today, but with the understanding that we have to consider perhaps some new ideas.”

CP: Do you think agriculture has too large a claim on Oregon’s water supply?

Johnson: “I do not. Oregon’s economy rests on the back of agriculture. Farmers, fishing interests, ranchers, other producers are part of the backbone of our economic past and certainly our economic future.”

Drazan: “I don’t. Oregon agriculture has always been a critical partner in Oregon’s economy, to Oregon culture, to Oregon families. And we cannot overlook the need for access to local food production.”

Kotek: “I don’t know if I can comment on that. What I do know is Oregonians like the fact that we grow things, that we are a leader in export products in the ag sector, and it’s kind of in the DNA of Oregon to grow things. So, I think ag is really important.”

CP: Statewide, how do you plan to balance the competing water needs of agriculture, growing human populations and fish under the Endangered Species Act — for example, in the Klamath Basin?

ath Basin?

Johnson: “Klamath is beyond complicated. And I really have not immersed myself. That’s a bi-state problem too because one of the tribes is in Northern California. And I’m not an expert on Indian law.

“But I think you should leave with the notion that I fully embrace the idea of using the governor’s office as the bully pulpit to convene people. I think we have not had adequate balance, particularly in about a decade on the boards and commissions or in the agencies. Not all voices have been at the table.”

Drazan: “You just struck on one of the most complex, political issues that Oregon has faced for decades.

“We’ve had administration after administration that has not necessarily stood up for Oregon in that conversation and said: ‘We need real, long-term solutions.’ Instead, you have folks in the Klamath Basin in particular that get tossed by the political winds.”

What does Drazan plan to do?

“I think it’s important that the people that are impacted are the ones to define what that range of policy objectives should be,” she said.

“I’m not gonna jump in with both feet and say, ‘Here, edict from on high, what I think is the solution that no one’s looked at.’ But I can tell you we have not had enough advocacy for the impacts on the community down there and that the political weight has been given in a heavier percentage to the needs of species.”

Kotek: “I think that is a key role of the governor: to make sure everyone is heard and balance all needs to the degree that we can.

“It’s complicated. I am not a water expert. The water situation in the Klamath Basin is incredibly important, and we have to make sure that all stakeholders are at the table.

“Being on the ground and seeing what’s at stake is important. You can’t go forward on these conversations without local input. I’m gonna be honest with folks: I don’t know if we can balance all the different needs. But we’re gonna try.”

CP: Climatologists predict Oregon will get less water in the future. Do you have a plan for collecting water during wet seasons for use in dry seasons via storage projects?

Johnson: “I would be instructed by my participation in the Umatilla Basin

Project, ‘cause that’s exactly what that did. So not only do I have a plan, I have practical experience.”

What types of storage projects would Johnson support, such as aquifer recharge, building new dams or raising existing dams?

“The ones that I am the most enthusiastic about is where water users help define the problem. But can I name you XYZ projects? I can’t. I’m interested in looking at anything.”

Drazan: “Yeah, support for storage is going to be essential moving forward.”

What types of storage projects would Drazan support?

“I will take an all-of-the-above approach that supports additional options that are feasible, that we can afford and that actually move the needle,” she said.

Kotek: “I have been supportive of water storage projects. I think cost is a big deal there, whether we can do some of these things. But we are going to have to be creative like that to make sure we have water during the seasons that we need it.”

What storage projects would she support?

“Honestly, I would not feel comfortable (naming specifics),” she said.

Kotek said she also supports more thorough monitoring of water usage.

“It’s really hard to know where we need to go if we’re not having compete understanding of water usage,” she said.

Kotek said she is also open to exploring different water delivery systems, including piping.

“I understand people like open ditches. I’m not sure that’s a good idea,” she said.

CP: What does good forest and public lands management look like to you? For example, do you support prescribed burning, grazing, thinning and logging?

Johnson: “Yes, yes, yes, yes.”

Although Johnson supports all four practices, she described nuances.

Johnson said she supports prescribed fire but has “questioned the competency of the Forest Service not to let some of those prescribed burns get away.”

Johnson said there are “subtleties” on grazing: “Do you keep the critters out of the streams?”

On thinning, she said, “We have got to thin.”

Johnson said she also backs post-fire salvage logging.

Drazan: “There’s a place for all of that, to be clear. We need to have active management of our working lands, and that has got to include forests.

“Technology exists for us to be able to identify, say, when lightning strikes occur, which may result in a fire start. We also have the Good Neighbor Authority program;

See Governor, Page 9

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