



AP Photo/Nicholas K. Geranios

Federal agencies are reviewing options for dams on the Columbia and Snake rivers.

Feds study options for managing dams on Columbia, Snake rivers

More than a dozen options

By **MATTHEW WEAVER**
Capital Press

Three agencies are considering 13 options as they develop a draft environmental impact statement for operating the federal dams on the Columbia and Snake rivers.

The options range from making no changes to current operations to breaching dams on the lower Snake River.

The study also includes maintaining current barge navigation on the rivers and providing the authorized irrigation water supply for the Columbia Basin Project.

U.S. District Judge Michael Simon in 2016 ruled that federal government plans for operating facilities violated the Endangered Species Act. He ordered the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, Army Corps of Engineers and the Bonneville Power Administration to study new alternatives to protect threatened and endangered fish.

Under the National Environmental Policy Act, the environmental impact statement must address long-term operations of the 14 federal dams in Idaho, Oregon, Washington state and Montana.

The agencies held an update webinar and conference call Wednesday to discuss their progress.

The agencies will evaluate the impacts of the alternatives on resources and include potential variations due to climate change, said Lydia Grimm, BPA senior policy adviser.

Among the alternatives under study is one that requires no action, meaning it would maintain current dam operations.

Another alternative would weigh the benefits and tradeoffs of removing the lower

Snake River dams, Grimm said.

Environmental groups claim breaching the dams would benefit the fish, while farmers argue it would make the river unusable for transporting wheat downstream to market and transporting supplies upriver.

'We want to make sure we're looking at the water operations that will help fulfill that current authorized water supply.'

Lydia Grimm
BPA senior policy adviser

Navigation is an authorized purpose for the system. The study objective is to maintain navigation, not change or improve it, said Rebecca Weiss, of the Army Corps.

The agencies will use what they learn in the studies to shape a preferred alternative, Grimm said.

"We want to make sure we're ... getting to the right combination and have the

complete answer," she said.

They will provide another update in the fall.

Some alternatives may not create the needed benefits or could have greater impacts, so the agencies will also consider ways to mitigate them, Grimm said.

During the public scoping process, the agencies received comments on the importance of the river system for agriculture and irrigation, which is being studied, said Sonjoa Kokos, bureau ecosystems analysis program manager.

The public will have the opportunity to comment on the draft in March 2020, she said.

A final statement is slated for March 2021 with a record of decision set for September 2021.

The objectives of the environmental impact statement include improving the survival rates for protected adult and juvenile salmon, resident fish and lampreys and providing an "adequate, efficient, economical and reliable" power supply.

The agencies also want to minimize greenhouse gas emissions from power production and meet the authorized water supply obligations, Grimm said.

"There's already authorization in the Columbia Basin Project for expanding irrigation for crops, agriculture and other purposes," she said. "We want to make sure we're looking at the water operations that will help fulfill that current authorized water supply."

Governor deploys National Guard, declares Salem water emergency

Triggered by algae bloom in Detroit Lake

By **DIRK VANDERHART**
Oregon Public Broadcasting

Gov. Kate Brown has declared an emergency and mobilized Oregon National Guard soldiers in response to an ongoing water quality situation in and around Salem.

Brown's office said Thursday the troops would bring large portable water tanks — known as water buffaloes — to the Salem area to ease a shortage of bottled water. On Tuesday evening, the city announced officials had detected low levels of cyanotoxins in the drinking water supply.

The toxins, caused by an algae bloom in Detroit Lake, can cause health problems if ingested by young children and people with compromised immune systems. The Oregon Health Authority has also recommended that Salem-area hospitals not expose patients to procedures using tap water.

"I want to ensure safe drinking water is available to all residents of Salem and Marion County," Brown said in a statement. "I'm directing Oregon's Military Department to deploy clean water stations and provide additional support to the community as conditions continue to be closely monitored to ensure the health and safety of Detroit Lake water users."

The drinking water warning issued by Salem officials on Tuesday prompted a run on bottled water in area supermarkets and has led to reports of price-gouging.

Brown's office began looking into the possibility of mobilizing the National Guard on Wednesday. The governor made the decision Thursday morning.

It's unclear how many



Molly J. Smith /Statesman-Journal

Pallets of water and individual water bottles are seen in the warehouse of Marion Polk Food Share in Salem. The National Guard will hand out free water to residents who can't drink tap water contaminated by an algae bloom.

troops will be deployed to the area, or for how long.

The governor's office says it's sending 10 water stations to five locations within the cities of Salem and Stayton. Salem's water system serves a population of around 200,000 — including the communities of Turner and Stayton.

Declaring an emergency in Marion and Polk counties isn't a prerequisite for calling in National Guard troops, one official said, but helps pay for the deployment. It will also allow Attorney General Ellen Rosenblum to investigate whether price gouging has occurred during the water advisory due to "abnormal disruption of the market." Gouging in such circumstances is defined as 15 percent or more

above the normal price.

According to spokeswoman Kristina Edmunson, the Oregon Department of Justice has received 15 to 20 complaints about price gouging since the water notice was issued. They include reports of a Safeway charging \$25 for cases of bottled water, and of a gas station in Brooks charging nearly \$48 per case.

A video posted to Facebook on Tuesday — just hours after the alert went out — shows cases of water sitting on the floor of the Brooks station, with makeshift prices scrawled in printer paper and taped onto them.

Salem said new water test results received Thursday showed cyanotoxin levels had not improved.

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