

Treaty: Farmers want to replace declining groundwater with Columbia River water

Continued from Page 1A

Kagele and other farmers want to replace the declining groundwater with Columbia River water under the federal Columbia Basin Project. Congress in 1933 authorized more than 1 million acres of farmland in the basin to receive Columbia River water under the project. Currently, only about 671,000 acres receive the river water, while the remainder depend on wells that are now declining.

“If we ever want to get a little more water out to the farmers and shut the rest of these wells off ... the treaty has to make room for that,” Kagele said.

Work on updating the treaty has been underway for years. The Bonneville Power Administration and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers made regional recommendations in 2013 that were developed through consultations with federal agencies, states, Native American tribes and other stakeholders.

A U.S. Department of State representative for Western Hemisphere affairs, who spoke on background, said key U.S. objectives include:

- Continued, careful management of flood risk.
- Ensuring a reliable and economical power supply.
- Better addressing the ecosystem.

Maintaining navigation, recreation, irrigation and municipal and industrial use of the river is vital to the economy of the region, she said.

Three dams in British Columbia and one dam in Montana were built as a result of the treaty, and 24 others fall under the treaty’s purview. Other dams along the Columbia and Snake rivers are operated by the Army Corps, the Bureau of Reclamation and individual utilities and utility districts.

“There are no current discussions regarding the number of dams as part of the modernization of the treaty regime,” the spokeswoman said.

The treaty has provided extensive benefits to both Canada and the U.S., and is an example of the strong bilateral cooperation between the two countries, said John Babcock, spokesman for Global Affairs Canada, which manages Canada’s diplomatic relations and promotes international trade.

“Canada is committed to working with the U.S. to modernize the agreement and to ensuring that it continues to provide shared, equitable benefits to both countries,” Babcock said. “Canada has been working closely with First Nations and basin communities to identify opportunities to further improve environmental conditions in the Canadian portion of the basin.”

Irrigation

Tom Tebb, director of the Office of the Columbia River for the Washington State Department of Ecology, estimates tens of thousands of farmers and others use the Columbia River.

More than 1 million acres of farms and scores of communities take water directly from the river, Tebb said.

Cities that get drinking water from the river include Revelstoke, British Columbia; Wenatchee, the Tri-Cities and Vancouver in Washington state; and The Dalles and Portland.

Water for the entire Columbia Basin Project, about 6.4 million acre-feet, is reserved in water rights, said Mike Schwisow, director of government relations for the Columbia Basin Development League.

However, the ability to draw water from the river depends on maintaining flows necessary for fish populations protected under the Endangered Species Act, such as salmon.

When further development is possible, dams will need to maintain flows for the river and still allow irrigation projects to withdraw water, Schwisow said.

Schwisow doesn’t expect this to be a specific provision of the treaty, but the league hopes for enough flexibility to work with Canada and provide the amount of water necessary for irrigation during the summer, when flows are lowest.

“If you don’t have water now and you hope some day that you will, it’s a very high priority,” he said.

Navigation

More than 50 million tons of wheat and other crops and products valued at more than \$24 billion were barged or transported by container ship and bulk freighter on the Columbia-Snake river system in 2016, according to the Pacific Northwest Waterways Association.

The association’s executive director, Kristin Meira, says she is comfortable with the state department’s understanding of the river system and what it means for U.S. freight.

Thirty-four ports dot the Columbia-Snake river system, from Astoria to Lewiston, Idaho, Meira said. The Snake River is a tributary and not directly included in the treaty, she said.

She hopes the treaty can stand on its own, separate from recent political tension between President Donald Trump and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

“We are a region that is known for working well together,” she said. “I hope this continues to be the case when it comes to the treaty, too.

Columbia River Treaty dams*

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| 1. Mica | 15. Brownlee |
| 2. Duncan | 16. Bonneville |
| 3. Corra Linn | 17. The Dalles |
| 4. Arrow | 18. John Day |
| 5. Box Canyon | 19. McNary |
| 6. Libby | 20. Ice Harbor |
| 7. Hungry Horse | 21. Priest Rapids |
| 8. Kerr | 22. Wanapum |
| 9. Thompson Falls | 23. Rock Island |
| 10. Noxon Rapids | 24. Rocky Reach |
| 11. Cabinet Gorge | 25. Chelan |
| 12. Albeni Falls | 26. Wells |
| 13. Post Falls | 27. Chief Joseph |
| 14. Oxbow | 28. Grand Coulee |



The Grand Coulee Dam on the Columbia River in Washington state is one of the 28 dams included in the U.S.-Canada treaty.

It’s been a model for cross-border coordination for so many years.”

Flood control

The treaty was originally negotiated after a spring flood in 1948 caused major damage along the river from Trail, British Columbia, to Vanport.

Vanport, one of the largest cities in Oregon at the time, was destroyed. The flood displaced 30,000 people from their homes and caused more than 50 deaths, according to the Army Corps and Bonneville Power Administration. The magnitude of the flood added a sense of urgency to the international discussions of flood control between the U.S. and Canada.

Under the treaty, the U.S. depends on 8.9 million acre-feet of assured water storage behind Canadian dams to reduce spring runoff, said Derek Sandison, director of the Washington State Department of Agriculture.

That guarantee goes away in 2024. A new “called upon and effective use” provision is scheduled to kick in, meaning that before asking Canadian dam managers to store runoff, the U.S. would need to make use of all its dams and reservoirs for flood control. That means reducing the water level in U.S. reservoirs in anticipation of storing the spring runoff, Sandison said.

“It’s that whole notion of really drawing down our reservoirs and hoping we get

the March (runoff) forecast right,” he said. If they’re wrong, the river flow could be too low to meet all water users’ needs.

“Predictability in river operations is very important,” he said. “The more we can get back to a predictable arrangement, the better for water supply.”

If and when the U.S. asks for Canadian dams to store spring runoff, the U.S. would also have to pay, Sandison said. At this point in the negotiations it’s not clear how such payments would be structured.

There must also at least be a pathway to use additional water supplies in nontreaty reservoirs that have been built by Canada beyond the current terms of the treaty, Sandison said.

Oregon and Washington state officials think such access is possible, but know it won’t be free, he said.

“Certainly we hold out hope that could be possible,” he said.

Electricity

The Columbia is the largest hydropower-producing river in North America.

According to the Army Corps and Bonneville Power Administration, treaty negotiators in the early 1960s agreed that the U.S. and Canada would equally share downstream power benefits, the increased power generation in the U.S. allowed by the additional storage capacity of the three dams built in Canada. The benefits

are calculated annually according to a complex formula that uses the theoretical value placed on the additional generation of electricity made possible by the Canadian dams. Canada’s half is called the Canadian Entitlement.

The Army Corps and BPA also believe the Canadian Entitlement has more than repaid Canada’s cost of building the three dams, they said in their 2013 review of the treaty.

Ecosystem

Native American tribes and public comments have demanded more attention to the environment, said Tebb, of Ecology’s Office of the Columbia River.

“We value aquatic resources and the salmon as much as we value the farmer and the agricultural economy and value our farmers bring to market,” Tebb said.

Tebb pointed to a U.S. District Court order in 2016 to study new alternatives to protect endangered fish and address ongoing flow issues in various tributaries.

“Everyone wants a piece of this river, and we’re just going to have to manage it wisely and be thoughtful to all of those interests,” he said.

It’s not yet clear how a focus on the ecosystem would affect irrigation, navigation or recreation, Sandison said.

Environmental advocates want water flows increased during salmon migration periods. They’re also worried about water quality during the summer when the flow is lowest.

Impacts on agriculture depend on how much water is pushed out and when, Sandison said.

“If you push out water in the spring, it’s not there in the summer or early fall,” when it’s needed for irrigation, he said.

The future

Kagele, the Odessa farmer, took his first look in June at construction work on the first of at least eight pump stations designed to help farmers draw Columbia River water from the East Low Canal. The EL 47.5 pump station is slated to start operations in the spring of 2020 and will serve five farms.

Kagele has high hopes for the completion of the Columbia Basin Project and, as the Columbia River Treaty is renegotiated, the continued availability of the river’s water for hundreds and hundreds of other irrigators like him across Washington state, Oregon and Idaho.

But for him, the Columbia River isn’t just about water. It’s also about his family.

“I expect to be long gone and six feet under by the time this is all worked out, truthfully,” said Kagele, who plans to transfer the farm to his son in the next few years. “As long as we’re working towards that goal, I’m a happy person. Doing some good for my grandchildren and their children — my goal has been met.”

Income tax: The Tax Foundation argues income taxes ‘tend to be more harmful to economic growth than consumption taxes’

Continued from Page 1A

The Tax Foundation argues that income taxes “tend to be more harmful to economic growth than participation, saving, and consumption taxes” and that they are a less stable source

of revenue because many people see their income fluctuate with the business cycle.

“Income taxes affect labor to investment, while consumption taxes, such as sales taxes,

tax what people spend as opposed to what they earn,” the Tax Foundation stated in a release.

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About 41.6 percent of Oregon’s state and local taxes came from the state income tax in 2015, according to an analysis from the Washington, D.C.-based Tax Foundation.