

Feds reject breaching Snake River dams

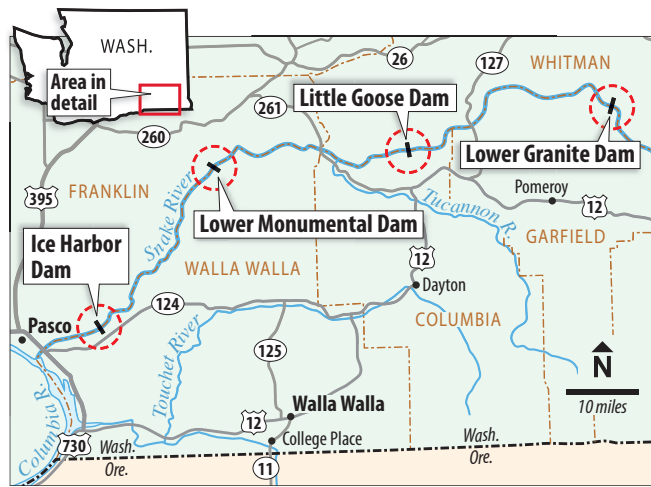
By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

A federal report released Friday rejects breaching four lower Snake River dams in southeast Washington state, finding it would raise transportation and production costs for farmers, while also increasing greenhouse gases, raising electric rates and making the Northwest more vulnerable to power blackouts.

The draft environmental impact statement, conducted jointly by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Bonneville Power Administration and Bureau of Reclamation, drew immediate criticism from environmental groups that advocate breaching the dams to increase fish runs.

The study considered removing earth on the sides of Ice Harbor, Lower Monumental, Little Goose and Lower Granite dams. Breaching the dams would have the most benefits for endangered salmon, according to the study, and several Indian tribes said it was the best option for offsetting the river system's harm to treaty rights.

But breaching would not allow federal operators to meet the congressional mandate to maintain the dams for navigation, hydropower and irrigation, according to the



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report. "It also has the highest adverse impacts to other resources, especially social and economic effects," the report states.

New congressional authority and funding would be needed to breach the dams, according to the report.

The study looked at the entire Columbia River hydropower system, made up of 14 federally controlled dams and reservoirs in Washington state, Oregon, Idaho and Montana.

The report's preferred alternative on operating the system includes modifying some fish-passage structures. Spilling more water over dams would also benefit endangered runs of salmon and steelhead in the lower Columbia and Snake rivers,

according to the report.

Friday's release opens another round of public comment on the dams' future. The comment period will close April 13.

The Center for Biological Diversity issued a statement accusing the report of giving "short shrift to the only viable alternative for saving salmon and ultimately orcas — removing the four lower Snake River dams."

The organization said it will seek one million signatures from supporters of removing the four dams.

The report itself acknowledged the matter wasn't settled. "This EIS is not expected to end the regional debate on the future of the four lower Snake River dams. On the contrary, this EIS provides information

and analysis to inform that future dialogue," the report states.

Breaching the dams would have major long-term benefits to fish in the Snake River because of improved rearing and migration conditions, according to the draft. Estimating the number of fish that would survive and return to spawn is difficult because of the uncertainty of ocean survival, the draft states.

Drawing down the water behind the dams could expose 14,000 acres that are currently underwater. The long-term goal would be to return the river to its natural state, benefiting tribal fishing, gathering and occupation, according to the report.

The report warned of high economic and environmental costs that would be felt throughout the Northwest.

Breaching the dams would approximately double the region's chances of a power blackout — to nearly once every seven years, the report estimates.

The power could be replaced by more natural gas-generated electricity, but that would increase the emissions of power-related greenhouse gases by 10% in the Northwest and would cost about \$1 billion a year, or one-third of BPA's revenue, the report states

Child care: A lot of local, state partners working on solutions

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"And that's where, in my belief, it really is critical to have state and or federal financial assistance to meet the need because it is something that directly affects the economy," he said. "And it is something where it would be an appropriate use of federal and state tax dollars to provide support to ease the burden so there is adequate child care available."

Kevin Leahy, the executive director of Clatsop Economic Development Resources, said private providers need support from the state or federal governments that can allow them to be competitive and stay in the industry they love.

He said regional business and educational experts are "providing training for these owners so that they're aware of how to navigate through all the different hoops they need to jump through on the regulation side."

Leahy said the cost to run a child care facility can become even more expensive when owners don't know how to navigate regulations. "It's very, very difficult to make it pencil out when you have all those other barriers around that," he said.

However, he said there are a lot of local and state partners working on solutions.

"This is a fast-growing industry. So I think if we can find a way to think out of the box and be like a prototype ... for the state and for the federal government ... I think we would have a lot of willing partners in that," Leahy said.

A child care task force was formed last year to

help spur more day care and preschool options in the county. Amy Lovelace, the regional preschool planning lead at the Northwest Early Learning Hub, brought together more than 30 partners.

But grant funding for her position runs out at the end of the month, and monthly meetings have been paused as the task force looks for someone who can step up and lead the group.

County Commissioner Lianne Thompson, who represents the Board of Commissioners on the task force, said it has been limited in the same way other initiatives are limited in the county.

"We're so thin on resources, we can't afford the staff to do the development that has to happen to get us more resources," she said.

In the meantime, Lovelace plans on conducting listening sessions with child care providers to learn what they need to keep their doors open.

"What Clatsop County is experiencing, we're experiencing everywhere," she said.

"We see child care closing because people who start child care start it because they love children, and they want to support families. They don't necessarily have the business skills," she said.

Lovelace and Thompson said to move forward they will need support from the state and federal governments.

"The community needs to own it. And I mean the broader community — local, county, state, federal — we have to own it. This nation has not owned it the way European nations have owned it," Thompson said.

Eateries: Developers will also go through a conditional use process

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Five Guys, founded and headquartered in Virginia, has more than 1,500 locations in 19 countries. The closest location is in Longview, Washington.

MOD Pizza, founded in Seattle and headquartered in Bellevue, Washington, has more than 400 locations in the U.S. and United Kingdom. After raising more than \$160 million in investment capital last year, the com-

pany hopes to reach 1,000 locations in the next four years.

Baysinger Partners expects a majority of customers to access the new restaurants from E. Harbor Drive, with Neptune Drive on the south end of the plaza a secondary access.

Warrenton, focused on avoiding traffic backups at drive-thrus like those around Wendy's near the intersection of Ensign Lane and Highway 101, required Baysinger

Partners to perform a queuing analysis for the Chipotle. Baysinger, after monitoring similar restaurants in Hazel Dell, Washington, estimated a maximum of six cars waiting, with online ordering making the operation much more efficient for traffic movement.

The city will also make the developers go through a conditional use process. Kevin Cronin, the city's community development director, said he pulled the process from

Astoria's development code.

"It's what we call an alternatives analysis," Cronin said. "So you have to prove that this is the right location."

Baysinger proposed a diagonally striped box directing drivers not to block the intersection on Harbor Drive between the drive-ways to the Old Youngs Bay Plaza and Shilo Inn. Cronin said the city has suggested a divider on Harbor Drive and only allowing drivers to turn right into or out of the plaza.

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