



A diagram of pumped storage hydropower.

PacifiCorp sets eyes on pumped storage hydropower project in southern Oregon

By BRADLEY W. PARKS
Oregon Public Broadcasting

Power company PacifiCorp is pitching a pumped storage hydropower project in Lake County that, if built, could become a significant source of renewable energy in the region.

"Pumped hydro," as it's sometimes called, has garnered attention from clean energy advocates as part of the path to decarbonization.

The systems work like giant batteries. They typically involve two reservoirs, one at a higher elevation than the other. Water flows from the upper reservoir into the lower reservoir through hydroelectric turbines similar to those used on the Northwest's many river dams, generating power.

When power is more abundant, that water in the lower reservoir can be pumped back into the upper

reservoir to start the power generation cycle over again.

Supporters of pumped hydro note that it's more consistent than other forms of renewable energy like wind and solar, which only generate power when the wind blows and sun shines.

PacifiCorp in October filed for a preliminary permit with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission to study the feasibility of a pumped hydro project in the Crooked Creek area near Paisley.

PacifiCorp spokesperson Drew Hanson said in an email that energy storage solutions like pumped hydro will become more important to the company as new renewable energy sources come online.

The company has proposed building a 52-acre upper reservoir and 50-acre lower reservoir, powerhouse and pump station, plus a nearly 20-mile transmission line connecting the system

to a substation in Lakeview.

The project would initially fill each reservoir by diverting water from the Chewaucan River via a new, 8.7-mile pipeline.

If built, the Crooked Creek pumped hydro project could generate an estimated 1,460 gigawatt-hours annually. That's enough to power more than 130,000 average American homes for a year.

Obtaining a preliminary permit from the regulatory commission is the first step in a long licensing process for a pumped hydro project. It gives PacifiCorp priority in licensing such a project at the proposed location. It does not allow them to do any construction or "perform any land-disturbing activities."

Two groups have filed motions to intervene in PacifiCorp's permit application, which establishes them as stakeholders in the process: the Oregon Depart-

ment of Environmental Quality and the Oregon Natural Desert Association.

ADEQ spokesperson said in an email that the agency files motions to intervene on all hydroelectric projects in the state. That allows them to comment on the proposal throughout the process.

Ryan Houston, executive director of the Oregon Natural Desert Association, said in an emailed statement that the conservation group is focused on protecting the Chewaucan River and nearby Lake Abert, a key pitstop for migratory birds. The group fears diverting more water from the river, which feeds the lake that's been drying up summer after summer.

"Ongoing water withdrawals, compounded by the effects of climate change, have put significant stress on this system, threatening the long-term viability of this important high desert ecosystem," Houston said.

Booster shots: Hopes to avoid hospitalization

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public health director, said the county would like to see boosters keeping pace with vaccinations. "We definitely want to see it higher," she said.

The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that people get boosters five months after their initial double dose of the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine, or two months after receiving the single-dose Johnson & Johnson vaccine.

"The data is really clear that individuals who receive both vaccinations and the booster are avoiding hospitalization if they do contract COVID," Jason Plamondon, the chief nursing officer at Providence Seaside Hospital, said.

"You may still get it," he added, "but your symptoms are going to be much more mild. Those that are requiring hospitalization and then end up with complications are individuals who are unvaccinated."

Boosters have been available since fall.

Lalich said there are several reasons why people eligible to get the extra dose may not have done so. People who are vaccinated may see getting the booster as unnecessary, or as something they can postpone. Meanwhile, many people have returned to work and are busy again. Lalich has heard anecdotally that people are experiencing "pandemic fatigue."

But, knowing that the booster increases immunity, Lalich thought people



Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

Public health leaders urge people to get a booster against the coronavirus.

would want to get boosted, particularly when the holidays arrived and more people planned to gather and travel. "But we just haven't seen it," she said.

People can now make an appointment to get a booster on Wednesdays at a Camp Rilea drive-thru clinic. Local health care providers can also administer the additional jab.

On Wednesday morning, Columbia Memorial Hospital in Astoria had four patients hospitalized with COVID-19, Judy Geiger, the hospital's vice president of patient care services, said at a news conference that day. She said the hospital has hovered lately between four and five virus patients.

Earlier in the week, the hospital had few beds available. "We were full on the in-patient side," Chris Laman, Columbia Memorial's director of pharmacy and cancer center services, said.

Providence Seaside had three COVID-19 hospitalizations on Wednesday, Plamondon

said.

On top of the surge, the hospitals' caregivers are also starting to test positive for the virus. This fact makes this surge feel different than previous ones, Geiger said.

"We're truly seeing more caregivers out sick, as well, which impacts our ability to care for patients," Geiger said. She said five employees who draw blood in the hospital's lab were out with illness, though Geiger did not say whether the illness was COVID-19.

Both the hospitals and the county health department are seeing a rush of people seeking virus tests. The hospitals' call volume has exploded.

People are asked to call the county's Public Information Call Center at 503-325-8500 — the community COVID line — so that cases can be triaged.

Some callers may be directed to an urgent care or emergency department, others to the county testing clinic or to clinics that the hospitals

have set up. And some people may be told to isolate at home.

People exposed to a COVID-positive case but who are boosted — or got the Johnson & Johnson vaccine within the last two months, or the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine within the last six months — and don't show symptoms need not quarantine. For them, a test is suggested after five days and masking urged for 10 days.

Most emergency departments elsewhere in Region 1 — an Oregon Health Authority-designated region that includes Clatsop, Columbia, Tillamook, Washington, Multnomah and Clackamas counties — are "on divert." This means that they are notifying emergency medical services workers not to send patients due to shortages of beds or staff.

Columbia Memorial and Providence Seaside aren't on divert, Laman said, but the region's challenge will make it difficult to transfer patients to Portland hospitals for higher levels of care in the coming weeks. Columbia Memorial is developing plans to deal with that, he said.

Nancee Long, the hospital's communications director, in an email, said, "The peak of this surge is on the horizon."

The Oregon Health Authority reported 41 new virus cases for the county on Tuesday and 95 new cases over the weekend.

Since the pandemic began, the county had recorded 3,198 virus cases and 37 deaths as of Tuesday.

Field: Facility could be ready for the 2023 softball season

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The lawsuit claimed that female students didn't have comparable athletic facilities as the boys, that they were unable to participate in team sports and that they had been excluded from the high school's athletic program. That case was dismissed after a settlement in 2014. Terms of the settlement were never publicly released, but the school district responded by adding lights and building a softball diamond at Broadway Field.

Dissatisfied with conditions at the softball field, Anderson filed a civil rights complaint in March 2019. The Office for Civil Rights followed up, concluding that the softball field, as compared to the baseball field, could result in the denial of equal opportunity to female athletes.

At the January school board meeting, Penrod said, the team will bring a recommendation regarding the preferred site for the

board to approve. They'll also present an outline for the other phases in the three-phase project. From there, they can start the design process.

"I'm extremely happy for the Seaside High School female softball players, finally getting the proper playing facility and the recognition as valued student-athletes of the district, something they have been denied by the district administration for many years," Anderson said. "It's too bad that it took an OCR complaint, which validated the inequality, for the district to finally see their discriminating ways. I will be following this closely."

Penrod said she would like to see the facility finished by the beginning of the softball season in 2023 if possible.

"I have said, 'If there is any way you can have it done by February or March, so they could have the new field to play on, that would be wonderful,'" she said.

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Sprouts: Closure will affect 33 different families

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The closure will affect around 27 children from 33 different families.

Dart-McLean said the num-

ber of children in the facility at a given time fluctuates since some children come on different days.

Dart-McLean did not provide any other information

about the virus case, but said the city is in the process of communicating directly with those who may have been in close contact with the employee.

Last summer, during a

surge of virus cases, the child care facility — among the largest in Clatsop County — closed for a few weeks after an employee tested positive for the virus.