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Staff photo by E.J. Harris

A Tidewater barge moves down the Columbia River on Wednesday near the Wallula Gap east of Umatilla. Oregon congressional delegates and Northwest tribal leaders are seeking to create a \$50 million grant program to improve water quality in the Columbia Basin.

Grant program would fund water quality projects

By **GEORGE PLAVERN**
East Oregonian

The Columbia River is a major source of renewable energy, food and jobs throughout the Pacific Northwest.

A group of five Oregon Democrats is now working to establish a voluntary grant program to keep the Columbia's waters clean of toxins.

Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley, along with Reps. Earl Blumenauer, Suzanne Bonamici

and Peter DeFazio, have reintroduced legislation that would set aside \$50 million over five years for projects to clean up the basin and more closely monitor contamination.

Dubbed the Columbia River Basin Restoration Act of 2015, the bill would provide funding for projects through the Environmental Protection Agency to cut back on pollution and eliminate pathways for toxins into the river — such as stormwater runoff.

The legislation is not a mandate, nor does it add new EPA regulations, but rather provides a competitive source of funding for organizations interested in cleaning up contaminated sites and monitoring water quality in the basin.

"The Columbia River is an Oregon icon that is central to both our environment and our economy," Merkley said in a statement Wednesday. "A clean Columbia River is essential for the health of our communities

and for the strength of our fishing and recreation industries."

Rep. Blumenauer described the Columbia as the "lifeblood of the Pacific Northwest," but said the river has become dangerously polluted. The EPA has identified a number of emerging toxic threats to the river, ranging from flame retardants to pharmaceuticals.

Those are in addition to what are known as legacy contaminants, including polychlorinated biphenyl, or PCBs, that are now banned by the EPA but still found in products like inks and dyes. High levels of PCBs in the river build up in the fatty tissue of fish and lamprey, and

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"Anytime the tribes see federal agencies willing to put water quality first, we are optimistic. This is a conversation we need to have."

— Sara Thompson, public information officer, Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission

Four big banks fined more than \$5B

Will plead guilty to market rigging

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Four of the world's biggest banks agreed Wednesday to pay more than \$5 billion in penalties and plead guilty to rigging the currency markets — a rare instance in which federal prosecutors have wrung an admission of criminal wrongdoing from a major financial institution.

Traders at JPMorgan Chase, Citigroup's banking

unit Citicorp, Barclays and the Royal Bank of Scotland were accused of working together to manipulate rates on the foreign exchange market, where hundreds of billions of dollars and euros change hands back and forth.

The penalties are a victory for the government and reflect a broader effort by the Justice Department, long criticized as reluctant to prosecute big banks, to tackle financial misconduct.

In the past 18 months, prosecutors have brought criminal cases against banks accused of tax evasion and sanctions violations, and have reached multibillion-dollar settlements with several others for their roles in the 2008 financial meltdown.

Still, the punishment announced Wednesday may have limited practical consequences.

The four banks will be able to continue to do business in the currency markets. No executives were charged, though that part of the investigation continues.

And the fines, while large, are a fraction of what the institutions have made through currency trading over the past decade.

Prosecutors said traders shared customer orders through chat rooms and used that information to profit at their clients' expenses. The traders called themselves "The Cartel," and in one of those chat rooms, a Barclays employee wrote: "if you aint cheating, you aint trying," investigators said.

The banks will pay a

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Farmers volunteer quarter of water rights

By **FENIT NIRAPPIL**
and **SCOTT SMITH**
Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — A group of California farmers, in a surprising turnaround, is volunteering to give up a fourth of its available water this year, sharing a resource all but guaranteed to them for more than a century.

A senior state official told The Associated Press Wednesday that he would decide whether to accept the offer by Friday. The concession by farmers in the Sacramento and San Joaquin river delta could be one of the most important yet forced by California's record four-year drought.

In exchange for taking 25 percent less river water for irrigation or leaving



AP Photo/Rich Pedroncelli

Irrigation pipes sit along a dried irrigation canal Monday on a field farmed by Gino Celli near Stockton, Calif.

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Government providing \$50M for Western water-saving projects

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The U.S. government will invest nearly \$50 million in water conservation and reuse projects in 12 drought-stricken Western states, Interior Secretary Sally Jewell announced Wednesday.

"It is absolutely critical that states and the federal government leverage our funding resources so that we can make each drop count," Jewell said at a wastewater purification plant in Los Angeles.

The money will partially fund more than 60 projects in Oregon, Washington, Idaho, California, Arizona, Colorado, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, Texas and Utah.

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