

## COLUMBIA: About 8M people live in the basin

Continued from 1A

can pose a health risk when eaten by humans or other animals.

Other contaminants can come from agricultural pesticides that drift in the air or seep into water runoff, as well as mercury from burning coal. Oregon's last remaining coal-fired power plant is located in Boardman not far from the Columbia River, though it is slated to close or switch to an alternative fuel source by 2020.

The Hanford Nuclear Reservation is also located along the river, which in the past has released radioactive materials into the air and water.

Some contaminants are known to cause cancer, while others are linked to neurological problems, birth defects and learning disabilities. As recently as 2013, Oregon and Washington issued warnings against eating resident fish from the Columbia between Bonneville and McNary dams due to high levels of contamination.

According to a fish consumption survey in the Columbia River Basin, tribal members were eating 6 to 11 times more fish than the estimated national average. Native fish are among the tribes' cultural and traditional First Foods.

Sara Thompson, public information officer for the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission, said they support the bill to encourage more conversation about the health and quality of water in local fisheries.

"We rely heavily on subsistence fisheries to feed our families, supply our longhouses and supply our churches," Thompson said. "The answer is not to tell people not to consume fish. The answer is to clean up our waterways. That should be our number one priority."

CRITFIC represents the four American Indian tribes with treaty fishing rights on the Columbia: the Umatilla, Warm Springs, Yakama and Nez Perce. Total enrollment in the tribes is approximately 21,000 members.



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

**The Umatilla River flows slowly under the Highway 730 bridge on Wednesday in 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.**

About 8 million people total live in the basin, which stretches into parts of seven different states. The river provides more than just habitat for fish and wildlife; hydroelectric dams generate a large amount of the region's electricity, and navigation locks provide safe passage for ships carrying cargo for industry.

The Pacific Northwest Waterways Association lobbies for that infrastructure to boost ports and trade. The organization has also thrown its support behind the river restoration act, saying clean waters are not only good for the environment, but good for business.

Kristin Meira, executive director of the PNWA, said ports and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers do their own dredging of the river in an effort to increase transportation and jobs. But if that sediment is contaminated, it can't be placed back in the water and becomes much more expensive to haul out to a waste repository for treatment.

"Contaminated sediment really is a problem for everyone," Meira said.

"It really is part of doing business the right way in the Northwest."

Meira said the bill takes the right approach by creating a voluntary program for funding projects, and not adding any more layers of government tape onto an already highly regulated system.

"The ports and operators are already very good citizens," she said. "We have a pretty great system here on the river moving any type of cargo in an environmentally responsible fashion."

A previous version of the bill was proposed in 2010 but failed to gain traction in Congress. Groups are optimistic about their chances of success this time around.

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

Contact George Plaven at [gplaven@eastoregonian.com](mailto:gplaven@eastoregonian.com) or 541-564-4547.

## FARMERS: Already ordered mandatory 25 percent cutbacks by cities and towns

Continued from 1A

a quarter of their fields unplanted, the farmers want guarantees that the state won't restrict the remaining 75 percent of the water rights they've had for more than a century, even if the drought deepens and other users go dry.

The offer was made as these and other "senior water rights holders" face an imminent threat of being included in the mandatory cutbacks that apply to most other California water users.

Water Resources Control Board Director Tom Howard told the AP Wednesday that whatever he decides will apply to the entire basin of the Sacramento River, which supplies most of the surface water in the food-producing Central Valley and provides drinking water to homeowners across California.

If the drought persists, even those farmers with the strongest water rights would have to stop pumping at some point, Howard noted Wednesday. His decision hinges on whether a voluntary 25 percent cut would be enough to replenish waterways that are vanishing, following a winter of below-average rainfall and record-low snows in the Sierra Nevada.

"Should we make an offer like that early, to give people clarity and regulatory certainty, or is there not enough water to really make a difference?" Howard asked. "We're just trying to make sure if the offer makes sense."

Delta water managers say it could become a model for farmers throughout California who are facing curtailments. It also could have an eventual impact on food prices, since agriculture uses 80 percent of the water drawn from the land in the state.

State officials had threatened to take

action as early as this week against senior water rights, some dating to claims made during the Gold Rush era, long before industrialization in the 20th century led to climate change. The rights give nearly 4,000 landowners the strongest claims in California to this precious and increasingly limited resource.

With California's drought showing no signs of easing, the state already has ordered mandatory, 25 percent cutbacks in water use by cities and towns, and greatly curtailed water available to other farmers and others whose rights are less than a century old, and therefore less iron-clad.

It is difficult to predict how many farmers elsewhere in California will participate, said attorney Jennifer Spaletta, who represents several Delta growers, but if the water board agrees to the deal, they could plan growing seasons with more certainty.

"From a business standpoint, it makes a lot of sense to do our part and to help in the emergency," Spaletta said.

Gov. Jerry Brown has been criticized for sparing many farmers from the tightening regulations forcing cutbacks in communities throughout the state. This is the second straight year that thousands of "junior water-rights holders," whose claims were staked after 1914, have been ordered to stop pumping river water for irrigation.

The reduction farmers propose is reasonable because it matches what the governor has asked of all other Californians, Jonas Minton, former deputy director of the California Department of Water Resources, and now a water policy adviser for the Sacramento-based Planning and Conservation League environmental group.

## WATER: In Oregon, \$1M will go to help install canal pipes

Continued from 1A

It will help pay for studies and projects to stretch water supplies by creating pipelines, eliminating leaky open canals and upgrading existing reclamation and water treatment plants.

The idea is to conserve water in order to replenish shrinking groundwater supplies and ease the use of expensive imported water.

In Oregon, \$1 million in funding will help the Three Sisters Irrigation District project install pipes in 14,000 feet of the open Watson-McKenzie Main Canal, saving 1,900 acre-feet of water that would otherwise seep away. Some of the conserved water will be used for Whychus Creek to benefit salmon, trout, frogs and other wildlife.

California and Texas, with huge agricultural, industrial and residential demands on water supply, have the lion's share of the projects.

About \$5 million in federal funding will go to help build more than 20 miles of recycled water pipeline, add a pair of 2.75-million gallon storage reservoirs and make other improvements to a program that provides recycled water throughout Santa Clara County in California's Silicon Valley.

Other projects include building a wastewater collection and treatment plant in Yucca Valley to replenish the groundwater in the California high desert area; building pipelines and pumping stations to provide reclaimed water for irrigation; and restoring salt marsh and other habitat in Marin, Sonoma and Napa counties.

## PROMISE: Seven students will be awarded new honors diploma

Continued from 1A

to get a preview of university life by staying in the dorms at Eastern Oregon University for a few weeks while taking summer institute classes.

Kirsten Wright, Stanfield Secondary's school counselor, said the culture of the school has changed in the past three years to where starting work on a college degree in high school is the norm.

"Even eighth graders will say, 'I want to get my AAOT,'" she said, referring to the Associate of Arts Oregon Transfer Degree.

Wright said during Eastern Promise's first year it was hard to fill the college courses offered on the Stanfield campus, but now "those classes are about full to capacity."

While earning college credit in high school used to be reserved for the stereotypical valedictorian types, at Stanfield not everyone taking college classes was always a straight A student.

Eddie Hernandez, a senior, said he didn't care much about his education when he started high school and he failed a few classes his first year.

"I was your typical freshman," he said.

When he saw his older sister earning college credit, however, it got him thinking about his own future. Now he is graduating on Sunday with 42 college credits on his transcript.

This year the school developed an honors diploma, which seven students will be awarded on Sunday. One of the requirements is to earn 30 college credits.

There are more than seven students who earned 30 credits, however. Kayla Smith said she has 42 college credits but her GPA fell just short of the standard needed for an honors diploma.

She said she has "always had big goals," but being able to get such a big head start on college for only \$10 a credit hour through Eastern Promise has helped her feel more confident in her ability to earn a psychology degree.

Principal Bryan Johnson said the school's ability to offer college courses on campus, thanks to a partnership with Blue Mountain Community College and Eastern Oregon University, comes at a good time. Next year the state has mandated that schools must show 82 percent of their students are taking a full class load.

For schools that have been easing classroom overcrowding and teacher shortages by scheduling most of their upper-classmen with a study period or two, that's a problem. But with Eastern Promise, Johnson said there are plenty of options to keep Stanfield seniors occupied for a full seven periods a day.

Eastern Promise has changed senior year, he said, from a blow-off year of easy classes and free periods to one of serious college preparation.

"Senior year we see a lot more kids taking that extra science class and extra math class instead of an easy elective," he said.

Contact Jade McDowell at [jmcdowell@eastoregonian.com](mailto:jmcdowell@eastoregonian.com) or 541-564-4536.

## UTILITY: City plans to raise rates by \$10 this year, \$5 in 2016

Continued from 1A

and low-interest, long-term loans from state agencies, such as the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality's clean water loan fund or Business Oregon's Infrastructure Finance Authority. City recorder Teri Porter told the council that to qualify for the grants or loan, the rates needed to be in line with similar cities.

Pilot Rock, population about 1,500, charges a base rate of \$21 a month for sewer and \$18 a month for water, according to Porter, who at the meeting showed Irrigon, population about 1,800, charges \$54 a month for sewer and \$42 a month for water. And Enterprise, with a population of 1,940, charges \$56.50 for sewer and \$24 for water.

Porter said the city plans to raise rates \$10 this year, then at least \$5 in 2016 and at least \$5 more in 2017 to move above \$40 a month. The city could then qualify for loans from the state at a 1 percent interest rate, she said, and that low rate would amount to big savings over the course of the loan.

The rate hikes, though, drew opposition from Taylor and a handful of citizens who said they and others live on fixed income and could not afford the increase. Some also argued the council should not increase wages in the budget and should make city employees, the mayor and council members pay full price for sewer and water.

The city some time ago reduced those rates for employees in lieu of a pay raise, Porter said, and the 2 percent increase for employees this year is a cost of living adjustment. Living costs have increased 8.5 percent in the last five years, she said, but city employees in that time received increases totaling 6 percent.

Porter on Wednesday in an email stated city employees who live in the city limits and the mayor and councilors do not pay the base rate but do pay 32 cents per 100 cubic feet of water once they have gone over the base amount.

Councilman Doherty said the city should have been raising rates long before now, but failing infrastructure means the city cannot put this off any longer.

Most councilors, though, said they liked Taylor's suggestion of a lagoon reserve fund for the sewer project. Perkins moved to create the fund using \$39,562 from economic development money, which Porter said was doable. Hinkle and Moss did not back the plan. Moss indicated she wanted more time before deciding. But it passed 3-2.

Perkins also said it may be four years before the city even breaks ground on the project, so they have time to look at other ways to help cover the costs.

Contact Phil Wright at [pwright@eastoregonian.com](mailto:pwright@eastoregonian.com) or 541-966-0833.

# MULE MANIA

MAY 22-24 2015

Bring the Whole Family!

FREE ★ PUBLIC WELCOME

DAYTON • WA

COLUMBIA COUNTY FAIRGROUNDS

www.mulemaniadayton.com

- ★ **300-400 MULES AND DONKEYS** and Their Owners Expected to Attend!
- ★ **COMPETITION** in a Variety of Classes from Western and English Pleasure, Dressage, Trail, Cattle & Driving
- ★ **PARADE** in Historic Downtown Dayton on Saturday
- ★ **REAL COWBOY COOKIN'** American Chuck Wagon Association Cook-Off. Dinner Tickets Available for Fri & Sat
- ★ **THE GATHERING** with Vendors & Authentic Western Sales