

Study: dams led to salmon die-off on Snake River

By GEORGE PLAVERN East Oregonian



AP file photo

In this Oct. 19, 2016 file photo, a man fishes for salmon in the Snake River above the Lower Granite Dam in Washington state.

A new report released by environmental advocacy group Columbia Riverkeeper suggests that the massive die-off of Snake River sockeye salmon during the exceptionally hot and dry summer of 2015 could have been avoided, if not for the four federal dams on the lower Snake River in eastern Washington.

More than 250,000 endangered sockeye died due to a lethal combination of hot weather and low flows that raised water temperatures in the Columbia and Snake rivers. Migrating salmon rely on cold water for survival, and have trouble moving upstream as temperatures reach 68 degrees.

Using computer simulations, Columbia Riverkeeper determined that average river temperatures would likely have remained below 68 degrees in the lower Snake River if the four dams — Ice Harbor, Lower Monumental, Little Goose and Lower Granite — were not in place.

Miles Johnson, clean water attorney for Columbia Riverkeeper and one of the authors on the report, said he hopes it will prompt the Environmental Protection Agency and U.S. Army Corps of

Engineers to take a hard look at breaching the dams to keep water temperatures healthy for fish.

"Snake River dam removal needs to be on the table," Johnson said. "Because it will work."

Last year, a federal judge in Portland rejected the federal government's latest proposal for managing dams in the Columbia Basin. U.S. District Court Judge Michal Simon ruled the plan needs a major overhaul, and that breaching one or more of the lower Snake dams ought to be considered.

In its analysis, Columbia Riverkeeper focused on 2015 because, as Johnson said, it shows what could become the new normal for the region given climate change, with the Pacific Northwest

trending toward wetter springs and hotter summers.

The study, which was released Aug. 14, uses a model known as "RBM-10," developed by the EPA in 2001 to study temperatures of the Columbia and Snake rivers. RBM-10 takes into account a number of different factors, including air temperature and river geometry, to come up with a prediction of water temperature.

According to the report, a free-flowing lower Snake River would have remained cooler than 68 degrees throughout most of the summer of 2015. On the other hand, temperatures broke 68 degrees from mid-June until September in most of the dammed lower Snake.

Terry Flores, executive

director for Northwest RiverPartners, criticized the modeling in the report, which she said is overly simple and one-dimensional. It is especially glaring that the study did not incorporate use of cold water in Brownlee and Dworshak reservoirs to reduce water temperature during the 2015 crisis, she added.

"This is hardly a convincing analysis to argue for Snake dam removal, a draconian action given the benefits these dams provide," Flores said.

Northwest RiverPartners is an organization that represents farmers, ports, electric utilities and businesses along the Columbia and Snake rivers. Flores said the study is a thinly disguised attempt to undermine legislation that would keep the current salmon plan in place while agencies work out a new hydro system operations plan.

A spokeswoman for the Army Corps of Engineers in Walla Walla declined to comment on the study Monday. The Corps is working along with Bureau of Reclamation and Bonneville Power Administration on an updated environmental impact statement on 14 dams within the interior Columbia Basin, including the lower Snake dams.

BRIEFLY

Amazon plans to add another massive Oregon warehouse

PORTLAND (AP) — Amazon plans to hire more than 1,000 full-time employees to work in a new packing and shipping warehouse in Salem.

The company announced the million-square-foot facility on Monday, but declined to say when it will be up and running.

Sanjay Shah is Amazon's vice president of North America Customer Fulfillment.

Shah said in a statement that support from Gov. Kate Brown, local leaders and others was instrumental in the company's decision to put the warehouse in the state capital.

The online retail giant previously announced plans to put a similar warehouse in Troutdale, near Portland.

Brown says Amazon's expansion means "more jobs and bright futures" for Oregonians.

Refuge occupier sentenced to probation

PORTLAND (AP) — A federal judge sentenced a North Carolina man on Monday to two years on probation for his role in last year's takeover of a national wildlife refuge in Oregon.

U.S. District Judge Robert Jones also ordered Jason Blomgren to pay \$3,000 restitution. The judge, however, expressed doubt that Blomgren — with \$3.83 to his name — would be able to pay.

"You're about as broke as anyone I've seen," Jones said at the hearing.

Blomgren traveled to southeastern Oregon in January 2016 to perform guard duty during the occupation of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge. He pleaded guilty to conspiracy months before the autumn 2016 trial in which occupation leader Ammon Bundy and six others were acquitted.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Craig Gabriel described Blomgren on Monday as a minor player in the 41-day occupation to protest federal land use policies. He said Blomgren arrived after it began and spent 15 days on the refuge.

Hillary Clinton to speak in Portland to promote book

PORTLAND (AP) — Former Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton will visit Portland to promote her new book, "What Happened."

In the book to be released Sept. 12, Clinton discusses her losing presidential bid, her thoughts on being a woman in politics and what it was like to campaign against President Donald Trump.

She will speak Dec. 12 at Arlene Schnitzer Concert Hall.

Tickets go on sale Sept. 18.

Portland is her last stop on an eight-city book tour that starts in late October.

Motorcyclist strikes black bear in Marion County

SALEM (AP) — A motorcyclist struck and killed a black bear that wandered into his lane of travel in Oregon.

The Marion County Sheriff's Office said Sunday night that the man was flown to a hospital for treatment of his injuries. The black bear died at the scene and was taken care of by Forest Service employees.

The authorities say the collision is a reminder to be careful when driving in rural areas.

New path sought for high-voltage transmission lines

BOISE, Idaho (AP) — Federal officials on Monday reopened public comments on proposed routes for two high-voltage transmission lines in Idaho intended to modernize the Pacific Northwest's energy grid.

The U.S. Bureau of Land Management announced it will take comments through Sept. 27 for two segments of the Gateway West project proposed by Idaho Power and Rocky Mountain Power.

The BLM in January approved routes for the two 500-kilovolt transmission lines on public land in Idaho's Gooding, Elmore, Owyhee, Cassia and Twin Falls counties.

But legislation by Idaho Republican Rep. Mike Simpson signed into law in May by President Donald Trump mandates segments not connected to those routes.

The legislation removes 2,800 acres from the Morley Nelson Snake River Birds of Prey National Conservation Area so 74 miles of transmission lines can go through.

The BLM is now trying to connect the remaining 250 miles of transmission lines with those segments. As part of that process, it's taking public comments for an environmental assessment.

"We need to make sure the alternative we now select connects with those two statutory rights of way," said BLM spokeswoman Heather Feeney.

The 1,000-mile Gateway West project is one side of a giant triangle of transmission lines that Rocky Mountain Power says are necessary to meet future demands in the region and improve reliability. One part is finished, and the other segment is at an earlier

stage in the environmental review process.

The segment going through Idaho would deliver power from southern Wyoming to points west, potentially tapping into Wyoming's wind energy. Federal officials have already approved the rest of the Gateway West project, but no work has started.

Feeney said a draft of the environmental assessment on the remaining segments should be ready by the end of this year, with a final decision expected in the spring.

"The route through the Birds of Prey was a fair and balanced outcome to this transmission siting effort," said Idaho Power spokeswoman Stephanie McCurdy. "The State of Idaho, local units of government, ranchers, environmental interests and project proponents worked hard together to find this

locally driven, common sense solution."

The BLM has been working on the project since 2008, trying to thread the powerlines through a mixture of private, state and public lands that also includes key habitat for imperiled sage grouse and the national conservation area that is prime habitat for raptors.

It's been a difficult process, and the final decision in January was appealed by environmental groups, causing it to head to the Interior Board of Land Appeals.

Idaho Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter also asked Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke to direct the BLM to reconsider its January decision and review other routes using more federal public land. The BLM then asked the Interior Board of Land Appeals to remand the matter.

Corrections

The East Oregonian works hard to be accurate and sincerely regrets any errors. If you notice a mistake in the paper, please call 541-966-0818.

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