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OUR VIEW

Another voice weighs in on Snake River dams

An obscure division within the Office of the President now wants to weigh in on the fate of four dams on the lower Snake River.

Another voice that appears to be leaning toward removing the dams.

In a March 28 blog post, the White House Council on Environmental Quality outlined its efforts to study breaching the dams. Those efforts included a March 21 “Nation to Nation” meeting between federal agencies and leaders of the Tribes of the Columbia River Basin.

The Council on Environmental Quality was established during the Nixon administration under the National Environmental Policy Act. According to council’s website, it is charged with coordinating “the federal government’s efforts to improve, preserve and protect America’s public health and environment.”

According to the blog, the council last fall convened leaders from the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Bureau of Reclamation, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Army Corps of Engineers and the Bonneville Power Administration.

The group will “build on existing analyses to identify a durable path forward that ensures a clean energy future, supports local and regional economies, and restores ecosystem function, while honoring long-standing commitments to Tribal Nations,” the blog states.

“We cannot continue business as usual. Doing the right thing for salmon, Tribal Nations, and communities can bring us together. It is time for effective, creative solutions,” the blog states.

The fix might be in.

“We heard calls to support breaching the four dams on the lower Snake River to restore a more natural flow, also about the need to replace the services provided by those dams, and recognition that such a step would require congressional action,” the blog post reads. “We were asked to consider the Basin holistically because of its inherent interconnectedness.”

OK. Let’s consider the farmers and other people who depend on the river.

The dams in southeast Washington generate electricity and allow farmers to move grain by barge down the Columbia River’s main tributary.

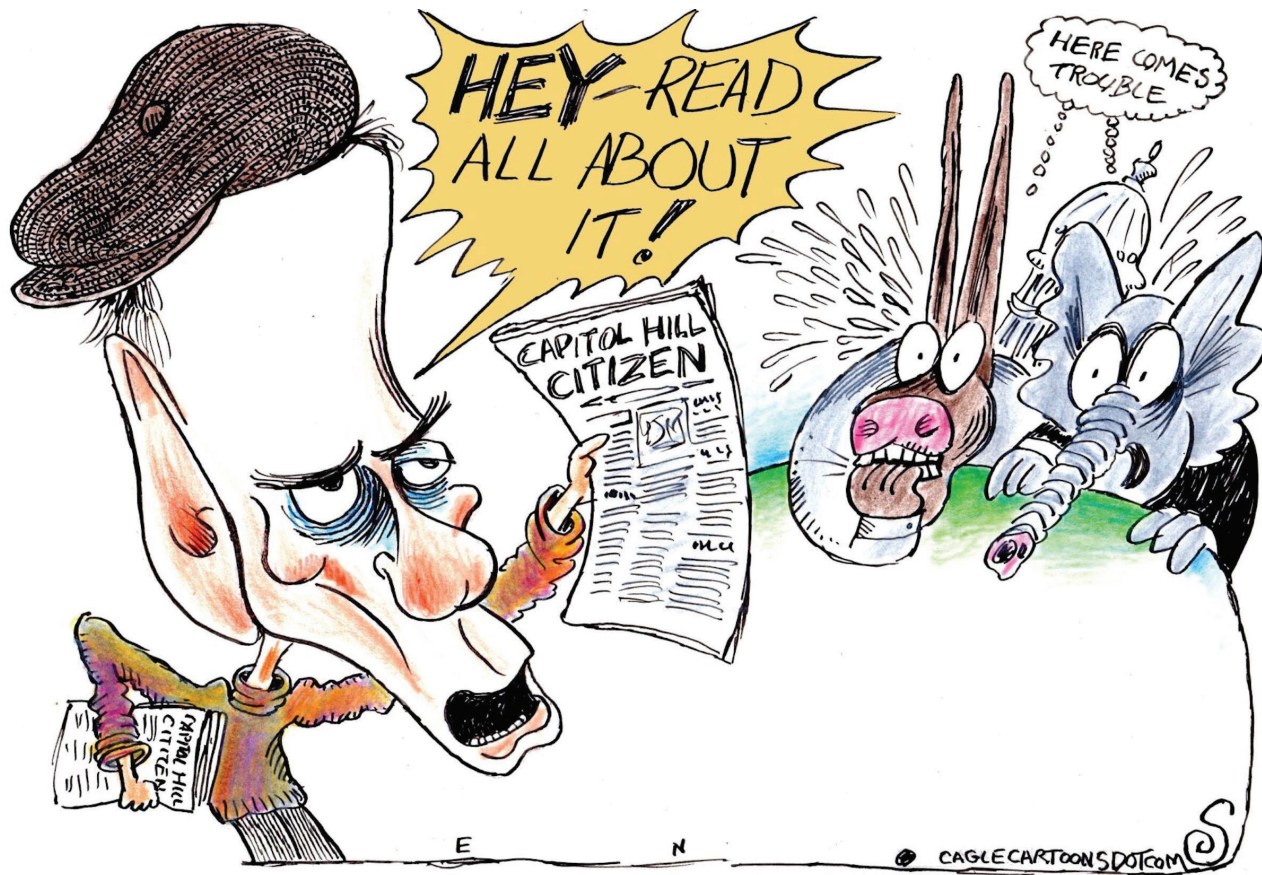
Without the dams, the river would be too shallow to barge wheat and other farm goods the roughly 100 miles between Lewiston, Idaho and the Tri-Cities. Lake Sacajawea, a reservoir created by Ice Harbor Dam, irrigates 47,000 acres. The loss of electricity generated by the dams would increase the cost of pumping groundwater.

The agriculture and shipping communities remain wary of discussions on the fate of the dams.

“We continue to be engaged with the administration at CEQ,” Michelle Hennings, executive director of the Washington Association of Wheat Growers, said. “Looking at the blog, we would have liked to see more focus on the impact this would have had on farmers across the country.”

Removing the dams would come at the expense of the entire region that depends on low-cost and reliable electricity the dams provide and the livelihoods of farmers, barge operators, deck hands, dock workers in the region and the vendors who support them.

It continues to be a bad idea.



The CoCoRaHS network



MARY
WISTER
EYE TO THE SKY

The National Weather Service in Pendleton is extremely grateful for the volunteers of the CoCoRaHS program. Volunteers take the time to provide daily rainfall and snowfall measurements, and this information gives ground truth to our forecasts.

What is CoCoRaHS? Pronounced as Ko-ko-rozz, the Community Collaborative Rain, Hail and Snow Network is comprised of volunteers who measure rain, snow and hail each day and submit these observations into a phone app or an interactive website. Automated weather stations are helpful, but only the highly expensive stations have heated rain gauges that melt snow for an accurate rainfall measurement. These are often the automated stations found at airports that are frequently calibrated and maintained.

Most home network and agricultural weather stations will measure liquid rainfall, however snow will accumulate inside the rain bucket then melt as temperatures warm above freezing with a sudden inaccurate rainfall measurement. In addition, the only way to know how much snow has fallen in a

24-hour period and measure the depth of snow on the ground is by manual observation with a ruler or snow stake. Despite the challenges of measuring wintry precipitation, the volunteers of the program have done an excellent job measuring snowfall and snow depth over the years.

Scientists love data. You’ll likely never hear a scientist say there’s too much data. The measurements taken by CoCoRaHS volunteers help more than just scientists. Everyone will agree that facts are better than a subjective analysis.

For example, if I were to tell you that thunderstorms produced heavy rain in Pilot Rock but only light rain in Pendleton, what exactly does that tell you? That is a vague description of what the thunderstorms produced. On the other hand, stating that 0.75 inches of rain fell in Pilot Rock but only 0.10 inches of rain fell in Pendleton obviously gives a better description.

We live in a busy world, and volunteers are hard to find. That’s why we want to take this opportunity to thank those who participate in the CoCoRaHS program. Their dedication is greatly appreciated, and the information supplied benefits our office and the communities we serve.

Are you interested in joining the program?

Requirements include a sturdy 4-inch diameter rain gauge, brief video train-

ing and a dedicated time each day to measure precipitation. The program may inspire the future meteorologist or hydrologist in your home. You’ll soon find out that taking observations each day enhances your knowledge of the atmosphere, and you’ll gain a deeper appreciation of weather. It’s interesting how rainfall and snowfall measurements compare from one location to another when you view the CoCoRaHS website.

One storm can bring substantially heavier precipitation just a few miles from another location, or steady precipitation from a large weather system may bring almost the exact same precipitation amounts over a large area. Many times, a NWS office will share data from the CoCoRaHS on social media or their website. If a severe weather outbreak or flash flooding occurs, the data may be used in research and storm reports.

If you’re interested or want more information, check out cocorahs.org. The NWS Pendleton office looks forward to receiving and reviewing your observations.

Mary Wister is a meteorologist and fire weather program manager at the National Weather Service in Pendleton. Wister serves as an incident meteorologist when large wildfires or other natural hazards necessitate an incident management team’s quick response to protect life and property.

YOUR VIEWS

Grateful for Commissioners Doherty and Lindsay

After reading the article in the Heppner Gazette Times dated March 23, 2022, entitled, “Amazon drops \$11.5 million surprise on county,” as well as the discussion on how to spend the gift payment, I found myself filled with admiration for county Commissioners Jim Doherty and Melissa Lindsay.

I feel that they are truly the voice for those of us who are in the county, who ranch and farm, as well as those who own and run small businesses.

Big money businesses such as Amazon will continue to force their way through the opposition of small-run operations to complete their agenda. It is nice to have elected officials standing up for those of us who are not always aware of what goes on at those levels.

In my opinion that is the very reason we elect these types of people, people we can trust to have our best interest in mind. My wife and I were privileged to attend a commissioner meeting in Heppner with three representatives of the Boardman to

Hemingway power line who answered questions from farmers and ranchers. We have also met with local farmers and ranchers to hear their opinions on the project and the Oregon Energy Facility Siting Council’s latest site proposal.

I think we are all in agreement on how the project would best serve our needs. Doherty and Lindsay seem to have heard our concerns and are actively engaging within the system to make our voices heard and accomplish the goals we are working toward.

Mitch Hays
Echo

Protect the Owyhee Canyonlands

The Owyhee Canyonlands remain unprotected, leaving this critical landscape vulnerable to the many tracts of lands within and around it being considered for mining proposals as well as the 170,000 active gas leases just north of the Owyhee.

If any of these proposals or leases were to go through, the landscape would

be vulnerable to all sorts of pollution: water pollution in the Owyhee River from mine-runoff, light and noise pollution from oil drilling infrastructure and air pollution from both mining and drilling emissions. Ultimately, this land development would lead to habitat fragmentation — a serious threat for the species that call the Canyonlands home.

The Owyhee is part of the sagebrush steppe, a threatened ecosystem that provides habitat for a wide variety of animals and plants. While walking around the 2.5 million acre landscape, you can see California bighorn sheep, greater sage-grouse, Owyhee clover, Packard’s blazing star and so much more.

Apart from wildlife, this remote, expansive place offers endless beautiful views — towering canyons by day, shimmering stars by night — and Indigenous cultural sites to explore and learn from.

We need to protect the Owyhee Canyonlands to ensure this habitat and all it provides will be available for future generations to experience.

Kristine Meader
Portland

EDITORIALS

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letters that address concerns about individual services and products or letters that infringe on the rights of private citizens. Letters must be signed by the author and include the city of residence and a daytime phone number. The phone number will not be published. Unsigned letters will not be published.

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