

Dam: \$16 million earmarked to rebuild Wallowa Lake Dam

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Now that funding is on the horizon, McMillen said he is focusing on regulatory and permit issues and refining the conceptual design in order to choose the best alternative by July 1.

In February, McMillen said he will present the work plan and schedule to the governor's office followed by meetings with the office of Oregon Dam Safety and local fisheries managers Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife and the Nez Perce Tribe.

"We will have the pre-planning work complete when the full budget is allocated," McMillen said.

That starts about a one-year clock for McMillen's team to prepare the final plans and specifications for the dam rehabilitation, including fish passage.

In August 2020 the lake will be drawn down and the dam demolished in September. McMillen said he leaving the foundation of the existing dam because it has adhered to soil, creating a seal, and will build on top of it.

The concrete at the base is friction locked and we don't want to dig it up," McMillen said. "We will peel off the bad concrete and encapsulate the whole thing — and have a 100 year-dam by doing that."

While additional funding may be sought to help pay for screen-

ing downstream diversions, McMillen said he anticipates he can achieve all of the rehabilitation goals with the \$16 million in governor's the budget.

The dam will be commissioned, complete with fish passage in 2021, McMillen said.

Fish passage opens the possibility of reintroducing sockeye salmon to Wallowa Lake, a species long extinct from the Grande Ronde River system.

Jeff Heindel, project manager for McMillen Jacobs Associates, said the brood stock will likely come from Redfish Lake in Idaho where Snake River sockeye were reintroduced several years ago.

"It's a great system to reintroduce sockeye," Heindel said. "We know the forest health benefits of anadromous fish — our generation is already seeing the impacts of lakes without salmon carcasses."

Irrigators along five ditches benefit directly from diverted water from Wallowa Lake, but Aaron Maxwell of the Nez Perce Tribe asked if Wallowa River downstream water users were being taken into account.

Joe Dawson, the district's secretary, said a lower Wallowa River Valley irrigator, Dennis Henderson, requested that he and his neighbors be included in conversations about rebuilding the dam.

Waterways group: Removing dams won't help orcas, environment, economy

By MATTHEW WEAVER
EO Media Group

LEWISTON, Idaho — Removing four dams from the Snake River won't help orcas, salmon, the environment or the economy, the head of the Pacific Northwest Waterways Association says.

Kristin Meira, executive director of the association, which includes ports, businesses, public agencies and individuals that depend on the region's rivers, cited figures from federal agencies to counter environmental groups' arguments for breaching the dams as she spoke Jan. 18 in Lewiston, Idaho.

Washington Gov. Jay Inslee recently announced his support for a \$1.1 billion orca-rescue plan that includes \$750,000 for another look at breaching the dams on the Lower Snake River.

The number of orcas in that population peaked at 200 in the 1960s, Meira said.

"Catastrophic" orca declines were due to shooting them before the 1960s because they interfered with commercial fishing. More than 40 orcas were also captured alive for aquariums in the 1960s and 1970s, leaving 71 by 1976. There are 74 today.

Few adults of breeding age were left at the time, which may also have an impact today, Meira said.

Environmentalists claim that removing the dams will save the orcas, she said.

"It's not as simple as one easy action that fits on a T-shirt or a bumper sticker," she said.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, or NOAA, the agency responsible for orca recovery, says the killer whales also eat chinook salmon that have picked up contaminants in the Pacific Ocean, affecting their ability to reproduce,



Matthew Weaver/Capital Press /Capital Press

Kristin Meira, executive director of the Pacific Northwest Waterways Association, speaks about the importance of the Columbia-Snake river system to the Lewis Valley Chamber of Commerce in Lewiston, Idaho.

Meira said.

Other problems are ships and boats, particularly whale-watching boats. The sounds their engines make underwater interrupts the orcas' ability to use echo location on prey.

"We're basically loving the orcas to death," Meira said.

Chinook runs along the West Coast, Canada and Alaska are important. The Southern Population of orcas migrates between Southeast Alaska and Northern California, spending only part of the year off Washington's coast.

"Focusing with a laser on four dams, that's not going to be the answer for these orcas," Meira said.

Juvenile fish survival numbers for the Columbia-Snake projects equal, and sometimes exceed, those of undammed rivers, Meira said.

NOAA says removing the dams would not have a positive impact on the fish, she said.

Three dams recently removed in the Puget Sound area — Elwha Dam, Glines Canyon Dam and Con-

dit Dam — were "ancient," completely blocked fish, were built for storage, with very little hydropower production and were "ripe for removal," Meira said.

The Snake River dams are an important source of reliable electricity compared to intermittent sources such as wind and solar, Meira said. They are also among the least-expensive power sources for the Bonneville Power Administration, she said.

"These are not loser dams that are too expensive to run and making power BPA doesn't need," she said. "Quite the opposite."

Meira cited claims from environmental groups that more than \$30 million was spent for sediment management on the four Snake River dams, adding that environmental lawsuits filed against the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers were the reason.

In most parts of the country, dredging is needed each year, Meira said. On the Snake, it's needed every five years, at most.

"Even though this is the most routine, win-win project you can think about, because

it is on the Snake River, it draws a lawsuit every single time," she said.

In 2005, the corps decided to settle with the plaintiffs to get the dredging done, but had to agree to a sediment study, which is not required anywhere else, Meira said. That study cost \$21 million.

"That's your taxpayer dollars spent on a study that you don't have to do for any other channel any where in the United States, but it had to be done on the Snake so the corps could get out and do that very basic maintenance activity," she said.

The Columbia-Snake river system is primarily a gateway for exports overseas, where ports in Seattle, Tacoma, Los Angeles and Long Beach are primarily to bring in consumer goods from other countries, Meira said.

Nearly 10 percent of all U.S. wheat exports move through the Snake River dams. The Columbia-Snake is the third largest grain export gateway in the world and the top wheat export gateway for the U.S. More than 50 percent of wheat shipped from the U.S. is exported through the river system, she said.

It is also the nation's second largest export system for soybeans from the Midwest.

In 2014, 4.4 million tons of cargo were moved by barge through the locks at the four dams, Meira said. That was 302 four-barge tows. The equivalent would be 43,610 railcars or 167,000 semi-trucks.

"Just think about what that would mean for our rail lines, if you can even find that many cars and get them out on the tracks," she said. "So then you think about your highways, and how many trucks you want on the highways, what it would mean for maintenance, for injuries, for fatalities."

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