

Local & State

FOUR DAMS ON LOWER SNAKE RIVER IN SOUTHEASTERN WASHINGTON

Study: Removal of dams would cost economy \$76 million per year

By Matthew Weaver
Capital Press

A new study finds that the costs to farmers and the region’s economy if the four dams on the lower Snake River were removed would average roughly \$76 million a year.

That equals as much as \$2.3 billion over the next 30 years, according to the study, which was commissioned by the Pacific Northwest Waterways Association.

Some of the estimated costs are in the form of higher expenses for farmers and others would be for building and maintaining roads, railroad facilities and storage facilities. The overall impact on the region’s economy is also factored in.

“Rather than an opinion poll, this study relies on existing data...,” association executive director Kristin Meira told the Capital Press.

The association commissioned economic consultants FCS Group to develop the study to offset misinformation about the value of the Ice Harbor, Lower Monumental, Little Goose and Lower Granite dams, all in Washington, to the region’s economy.

The association wanted to provide a full picture of the impacts that would be felt if the dams were removed, particularly in the transportation sector, Meira said.

The study doesn’t include the cost of breaching the dams.

Information in the study comes from government agencies, commodity commissions and ports.

“We don’t create new data here,” Meira said. “We simply evaluate the data and determine what it means for the Northwest if the dams were to be removed. ... This is actual data with regard to the value of commodities that move and how much transportation costs.”

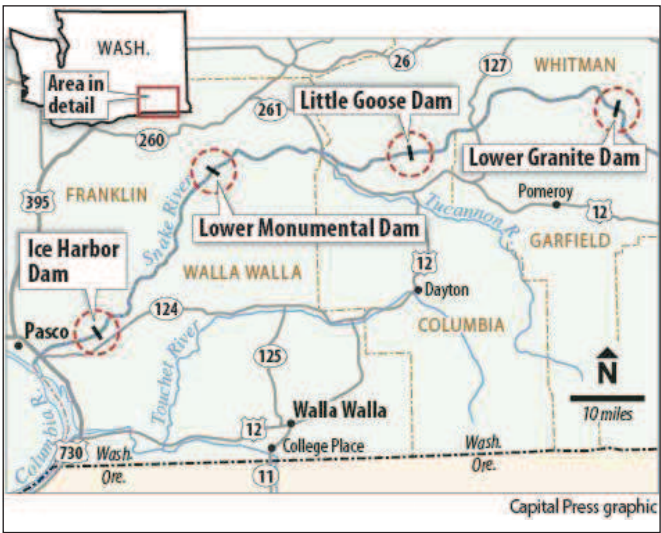
According to the study:

- Removing the Snake River locks would cause diesel fuel consumption to increase by nearly 5 million gallons per year as barges were replaced by less efficient



Associated Press file photo

The Lower Granite Dam on the Snake River near Pomeroy, Washington.



trucks and railroads. Carbon emissions would increase by more than 1.2 million tons a year; the equivalent of putting 181,889 more passenger cars on the road.

- Transportation and storage costs for wheat, the dominant crop in the region, would likely increase from 40 cents per bushel to 60 to 80 cents per bushel with dam breaching, according to the study. That would cost the region’s farmers an additional \$18.9 million to \$38.8 million a year.
- Expansion and maintenance of highways, railroads and grain elevators would cost more than \$1.6 billion. At least 201 additional unit trains and 23.8 million miles of additional trucking would be needed annually.
- Barges produce fewer emis-

sions than any other form of cargo transportation, Meira said. The association found the carbon impacts of shifting to trucks and rail “pretty stark.”

“It’s hard to picture being concerned with climate change and being in favor of dam breaching — they just don’t go together,” she said.

Idaho Wheat Commission board member Joseph Anderson, of Genesee, said in a statement that he would share the study’s results during a workshop in Clarkston, Wash.

The public can comment until Jan. 24 on a draft stakeholder report on dam breaching funded by Washington Gov. Jay Inslee’s office and the legislature.

“As this study shows, the Snake River dam system is

“While removing or breaching the Snake River dams will not increase salmon numbers with any certainty, there would definitely be negative impacts on people, including growers.”

— Joseph Anderson, Idaho Wheat Commission board member

the most efficient option for transporting goods such as wheat, generating renewable energy via hydropower and preventing flooding in the Pacific Northwest,” Anderson said. “While removing or breaching the Snake River dams will not increase salmon numbers with any certainty, there would definitely be negative impacts on people, including growers.”

The waterways association’s report will be part of the information provided to the governor along with the stakeholder report, said Tara Lee, deputy director of communications for Inslee’s office.

Meira said the association hasn’t found any upside to removing the dams, related to either the environment, transportation efficiency or safety.

“We haven’t identified any net benefit to removing the dams,” she said.

SCHOOLS

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That would bring the total improvement project cost to \$16.5 million.

Superintendent Mark Witty assured the Board that money taken from the Capital Projects Fund would not deter progress on other needed maintenance work.

A South Baker Intermediate roofing project will remain on schedule as well as a roofing project over the welding area at Baker Technical Institute in the northwest wing of Baker High School, Witty said.

Other targeted maintenance projects not included as part of the bond measure work include improvements to the Baker High School auditorium, built in 1950.

“We have a community group working with a contractor to take a look at it,” Witty said. “That is the best space in Baker County. It’s as good a space as we have and we haven’t put money into that for years.”

Improvements to Baker Bulldog Memorial Stadium is another project the District is looking at separate from the work funded by the bond measure.

Witty said recent “nonscientific surveys” of the staff and parents indicate that both groups show strong support for the new bond measure plan.

“Safety and security is the biggest yes overall,” he said.

A \$48 million bond measure that would have included building a new elementary school was defeated in the November 2018 election by a wide margin. That sent the District back to the drawing board with a greatly reduced plan based on voter comments that they wanted a smaller bond that would pay to remodel existing buildings rather than new construction.

The \$48 million bond proposal would have been repaid by District patrons over 30 years at a rate of \$1.97 per \$1,000 of assessed property value.

Under the new plan, District patrons will be asked to repay the bond over 10 years at a rate of 66 cents per \$1,000 of assessed property value.

If the Board chooses to move forward with the bond measure at its Jan. 16 meeting, the District will have until Feb. 28 to file a ballot title request with the County Clerk.

In other business during the work session Thursday, Mitch Saul, of Solutions Certified Public Accountants in John Day, spoke to the Board about the District’s 2018-19 audit.

“All indicators are positive,” Saul reported to the Board.

Rather than reviewing the audit report in the 20 minutes allotted for his presentation, Saul instead spoke about items listed in a management letter. These are issues that do not rise to the level of an audit finding, his report stated.

In working with Michelle Glover, who was hired as the District’s business manager in March, Saul said he was challenged to formalize the issues in a letter as a tool “to hold management accountable.”

Saul said he met with Witty, as he has done in the past, to inform him of the issues. Corrective action plans have been developed.

Matters noted in the management letter are:

- Inconsistencies and lack of controls for the documentation, review and approval over the payroll process.
- A new software program also contributed to the problem in payroll when teachers were replaced, Saul said. A “handful” of teachers received two step increases on the salary schedule in the past year as a result.
- Inconsistencies and lack of controls for the documentation, review and approval of journal entries. Such inconsistencies set the District up “to have fraud committed,” Saul said.
- Issues associated with month-end closing procedures. Saul said for example, closing work done on June 30 at the Baker Charter School had not been billed.
- Lack of ongoing maintenance of the Depreciation Schedule. This has been an ongoing issue in the District, Saul said. He suggested the District place someone in charge of assuring that the schedule is kept up to date.

FIRES

Continued from Page 1A

The wildfire crisis in Australia started in August, and blazes have killed at least 26 people, destroyed more than 2,000 homes and burned about 32,400 square miles. That’s about 10 times the size of Baker County.

Much of the damage has been in the Australian states of New South Wales, which includes Sydney, and Victoria, where the largest city is Melbourne.

Since early December the U.S. government has sent about 160 employees to New South Wales or Victoria.

The Australian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities first asked for U.S. aid in late November, according to the U.S. National Interagency Fire Center.

These include employees from the Forest Service, an agency of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and from agencies, including the BLM, that are part of the U.S. Department of the Interior.

The U.S. has had an agreement in place for more than 15 years with Australia and New Zealand in which the countries can request firefighting aid from each other. According to that agreement, the Australian government will pay sal-

Residents advised to evacuate

TOMERONG, Australia (AP) — Residents in the path of wildfires razing southeast Australia were urged to evacuate on Thursday if they don’t intend to defend their homes as hot and windy conditions are forecast to escalate the danger over the next two days.

The Rural Fire Service in New South Wales state has told fire-weary community meetings south of Sydney in the coastal towns of Nowra, Narooma and Batemans Bay that northwesterly winds were likely to once again drive blazes toward the coast. Vacationers have retreated to beaches and into the ocean in the area in recent weeks as destructive fires and choking smoke have encroached on the tourist towns, scorching sand dunes in some places.

In neighboring Victoria state, fire-threatened populations were urged to act quickly on evacuation warnings.

“We can’t guarantee your safety and we don’t want to be putting emergency services — whether it be volunteers or paid staff — we do not want to put them in harm’s way because people didn’t follow advice that was given,” Victoria Premier Daniel Andrews said.

Temperatures in the threatened area were expected to reach into the mid-40s Celsius (more than 110 degrees Fahrenheit) on Friday, and conditions remained tinder dry.

ary, travel, lodging and other costs incurred by the American firefighters.

The reciprocal pact makes sense from a seasonal standpoint, as the fire seasons between the Northern and Southern hemispheres generally don’t coincide.

Before the current rash of fires in Australia the last time the agreement was used was in August 2018, when 138 employees from Australia and

New Zealand traveled to the U.S. to help with wildfires in Northern California and the Pacific Northwest.

The current deployments of U.S. fire officials to Australia is the first since 2010.

Livingston was part of that contingent. He spent about a month in Victoria, Australia, during January and February 2010 — high summer Down Under.

The fires Livingston saw

reminded him of blazes in the southeastern section of the U.S., in that even healthy green trees would burn rapidly in certain conditions.

Among the more combustible trees in that part of Australia are species of eucalyptus, some of which can reach 200 feet tall, Livingston said.

“Eucalyptus is a very volatile fuel even when it’s green,” he said — due in part to the oils the trees produce.

Livingston said conditions during his time in Australia were similar to what they are now, with dry, windy weather

and temperatures well above 100 degrees.

“Even green things burn actively, and the fires can move very fast,” he said.

Livingston said wildfires are common in the parts of Victoria that he visited, and the forests, though vastly different in terms of species, were similar to those of the Blue Mountains in that fire has played a role in how the forests developed over the millennia.

“It’s a fire-adapted ecosystem,” he said.

Due to the frequency of

wildfires, Australia “has a very professional fire organization,” Livingston said.

The most notable difference between the Australian and American systems is that in Australia most firefighting resources are run by states or local and rural departments, a mixture of professional and volunteer crews.

Unlike America, where federal agencies such as the Forest Service and BLM have large firefighting staffs, in Australia the federal government plays a minor role in firefighting, Livingston said.

JANUARY 10-16

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MON-THURS: 7:00

STAR WARS:
THE RISE OF
SKYWAKER PG-13

FRI: (3:30) 6:30
SAT & SUN: (12:30) (3:30) 6:30
MON-THURS: 6:30

JUMANJI: THE
NEXT LEVEL PG-13

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